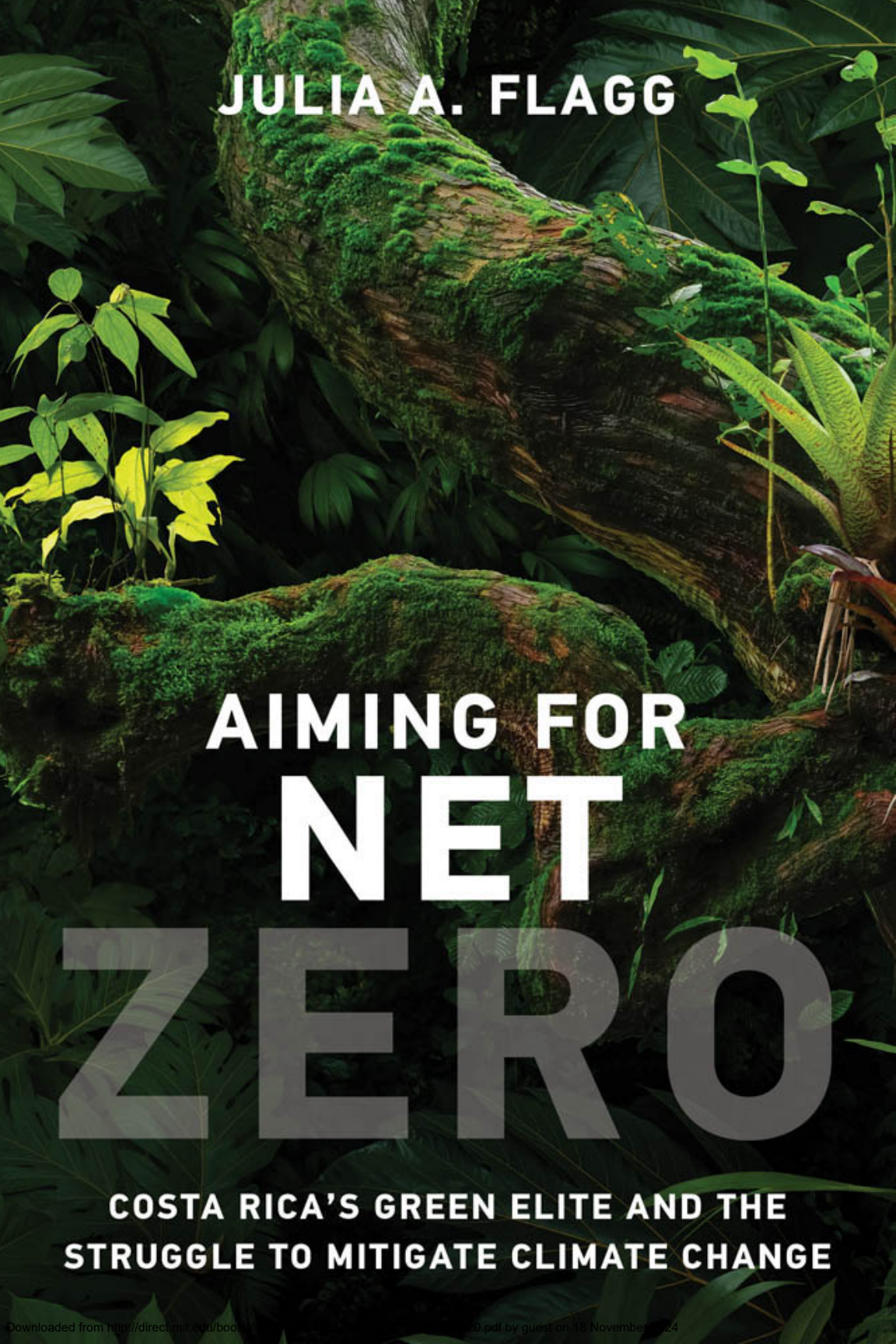

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AIMING FOR NET ZERO

COSTA RICA'S GREEN ELITE AND THE STRUGGLE TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE

JULIA A. FLAGG

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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ABBREVIATIONS

AI: Autonomous Institution (Institución Autónoma)
AIJ: Activities Implemented Jointly
AILAC: Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean
ALBA: Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas
ALIDES: Alliance of Sustainable Development in Central America (La Alianza para el desarrollo sostenible)
AOSIS: Alliance of Small Island States
BASIC: Brazil, South Africa, India, and China
BOGA: The Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance
CACM: Central American Common Market (Mercado Común Centroamericano)
CAFTA-DR: Central American-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (El Tratado de Libre Comercio entre Centroamérica y los Estados Unidos)
CAT: Climate Action Tracker
CATIE: The Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (El Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza)
CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity
CDM: Clean Development Mechanism
CINPE: The International Center for Economic Policy for Sustainable Development at the National University of Costa Rica (El Centro Internacional de Política Económica para el Desarrollo Sostenible)
COP: Conference of the Parties
CTOs: Certified Tradeable Offsets
DCC: The Climate Change Center (Dirección de Cambio Climático)

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ECODES: The National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development (La Estrategia de Conservación para el Desarrollo Sostenible)
ENCC: National Strategy on Climate Change (La Estrategia Nacional de Cambio Climático)
EU: European Union
FONAFIFO: National Forestry Financing Fund (El Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal)
FUNDECOR: The Central Volcanic Mountains Development Foundation (Fundación para el Desarrollo de la Cordillera Volcánica Central)
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GMA: Greater Metropolitan Area (Gran Área Metropolitana)
ICAFE: The National Institute of Coffee (El Instituto del Café de Costa Rica)
ICE: Costa Rican Institute of Electricity (El Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad)
IFI: International Financial Institution
IMF: International Monetary Fund
IMN: National Institute of Meteorology (Instituto Meteorológico Nacional)
INCAE: Central American Institute of Business Administration (Instituto Centroamericano de Administración de Empresas)
INDC: Intended Nationally Determined Contribution
INEC: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (El Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos)
INGOs: International Non-Governmental Organizations
INTECO: Costa Rican Institute of Technical Norms (El Instituto de Normas Técnicas de Costa Rica)
IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JI: Joint Implementation
LUCF: Land Use Change and Forestry
MAG: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (El Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería)
MIDEPLAN: Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (Ministerio de Planificación Nacional y Política Económica)
MIEM: Ministry of Industry, Energy, and Mines (El Ministerio de Industrias, Energía y Minas)
MINAE: Ministry of the Environment and Energy (El Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía)

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MINAET: Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Telecommunications (El Ministerio de Ambiente, Energía y Telecomunicaciones)
MINEREM: Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mines (El Ministerio de Recursos Naturales, Energía y Minas)
NDC: Nationally Determined Contributions
NRDC: Natural Resources Defense Council
OCIC: Office of Joint Implementation (La Oficina Costarricense de Implementación Conjunta)
ONF: National Office of Forestry (La Oficina Nacional Forestal)
PAC: Citizens' Action Party (Partido Acción Ciudadana)
PES: Payments for Environmental Services (El Programa de Pago por Servicios Ambientales)
PLN: National Liberation Party (Partido Liberación Nacional)
PUSC: Social Christian Unity Party (Partido Unidad Social Cristiana)
RECOPE: The Costa Rican Petroleum Refinery (La Refinadora Costarricense de Petróleo)
SWIID: Standardized World Income Inequality Database
UCR: University of Costa Rica (Universidad de Costa Rica)
UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
WRI: The World Resources Institute

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1 INTRODUCTION: COSTA RICA AS A BRIGHT SPOT AMID A CLIMATE EMERGENCY?

On a sunny May 8, 2018, Costa Rican president-elect Carlos Alvarado Quesada and his wife, Claudia Dobles, arrived at his inauguration ceremony in a hydrogen-powered bus. The ceremony was located at the Plaza of Democracy in downtown San José, Costa Rica. The Plaza abuts the National Museum of Costa Rica, a building that once belonged to the national army and the location where, in December 1948, then junta leader José "Don Pepe" Figueres Ferrer announced the abolition of the armed forces. The design of the Plaza itself was overseen in 1989 by then president Óscar Arias Sánchez to commemorate Costa Rican democracy. The ceremony represented the continuation of Costa Rica's unbroken tradition of peaceful transfers of presidential power that has endured in the wake of every presidential election since the six-week-long 1948 civil war. During the ceremony, Carlos spoke about the need to "decarbonize" Costa Rica's economy. As quoted in the nation's 2019 decarbonization plan, Alvarado claimed, "Decarbonization is the greatest mission of our generation, and Costa Rica must be among the first countries of the world to achieve it, if not the first" (Government of Costa Rica 2018, 3). According to news reports, "The concepts of 'inclusivity' and 'climate change' are ideas [Carlos] has fully assimilated" (Murillo 2018a). Why, and how, was Costa Rica able to make this pledge?

THE PROBLEM OF GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

The atmosphere has already warmed more than 1 degree Celsius compared to industrial times. The burning of fossil fuels—to heat homes, power transportation, and run industrial systems—has filled the atmosphere with

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heat-trapping gases. Deforestation has also led to significant increases in greenhouse gas emissions and is a driver of climate change as it transforms trees from sinks into sources of carbon dioxide. A small number of mostly wealthy nations (Brechin 2016), as well as China—a country whose high emissions are driven up by industrial processes to produce goods for wealthier consumers in the global north (Jorgenson 2012)—are responsible for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions.

The devastating consequences of just 1 degree Celsius of warming have arrived, also in starkly uneven terms. News of hurricanes, droughts, floods, wildfires, extreme heat, and other climate impacts appear daily. While people in the global north are not immune to the effects of these emissions (e.g., Bates 2016), the most serious consequences of living in a warmer world will affect marginalized communities in the global south. Within this context, large and small communities pursue climate adaptation, or they try to make their lives possible in a changing environment (Carmin et al. 2015; Adger, Arnell, and Tompkins 2005).

While large numbers of people the world over will need to adapt, there is also an urgent need for climate mitigation. Climate mitigation happens through efforts to either decrease greenhouse gas emissions or increase efforts to trap (sequester) those emissions. Several reports in recent years have highlighted how necessary it is to steeply reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. For example, in October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (the global scientific authority on climate change) Special Report revealed that to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees C, global emissions must reach 45 percent below 2010 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2050 (IPCC 2018). Although global emissions dipped in 2020 due to circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic (Le Quéré et al. 2020), emissions quickly rebounded in 2021 (Plumer 2021). In March 2023, the IPCC released a new report stating that global temperatures are expected to hit the 1.5 degree C threshold of warming as soon as the early 2030s (Plumer 2023).

Every tenth of a degree of warming corresponds to worse outcomes for people and the planet. Conversely, every tenth of a degree of warming averted could benefit people around the world. Given this context, there is a clear and urgent need for climate mitigation efforts and policies.

While these reports highlight the urgent need for more and larger-scale climate mitigation activities, they do not explain the conditions under which climate mitigation actually occurs. As news analysts reporting on the

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March 2023 IPCC report state: "There is still one last chance to shift course, the new report says. *But it would require industrialized nations to join together immediately to slash greenhouse gases roughly in half by 2030 and then stop adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere altogether by the early 2050s.* If those two steps were taken, the world would have about a 50 percent chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius" (Plumer 2023, emphasis added).

Considering that there have been very few climate mitigation achievements from industrialized nations, let alone a "join[ing] together" of industrial global powers, readers of these reports, and people generally concerned about the fate of the planet, are left with many questions. For example, why has there been such little movement on climate mitigation? These reports do not explain the political-economic dimensions that block climate mitigation action. They also do not explain why climate mitigation policies develop in some contexts but not others. Whether, when, and how climate mitigation happens depends on the decisions and actions of social groups (Ehrhardt-Martinez et al. 2015; Jorgenson et al. 2019). Within this context—of rapidly rising emissions and the catastrophic effects of rising global temperatures—what was it that enabled Costa Rican officials to adopt a decarbonization pledge?

THE PUZZLE OF COSTA RICAN CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

While scientific understanding about humanity's ability to alter the atmosphere has existed since the nineteenth century (Hulme 2009), it took many decades for there to be any kind of formal policy response to the issue of human-caused climate change. In 1992, people at the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, agreed on the text of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), signifying at least on paper a commitment by most nations to address global warming.

The UNFCCC included language holding that nations that were parties to the convention would work to "avoid dangerous climate change" and do so by acting "according to their common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities." According to Edwards and Roberts (2015, 45), all parties (nations) to the convention agreed to this text because they interpreted it in different ways. The convention classified nations based on their historical responsibilities for the climate problem and their capacities to address the climate threat.

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FIGURE 1.1
A map of Costa Rica in Central America.

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These differences between countries materialized in 1995, when the first Conference of the Parties (to the convention) meeting was held in Berlin. The goal of the Berlin Mandate, which emerged from this meeting, was to strengthen commitments from Annex I Parties (wealthier, "developed" countries) in order to meet the goals outlined in the UNFCCC (UNFCCC Secretariat 2000). Two years later, nations approved the Kyoto Protocol at the December 1997 COP3 meeting, opening up the possibility for individual nations to sign and implement the protocol at the national level. Given their historical responsibility for the first surge in anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, the Kyoto Protocol called on industrialized, Annex I Parties to reduce emissions first. However, many of these nations, including the United States, failed to meaningfully curtail emissions (McCright and Dunlap 2000, 2003; Fisher 2004).

Recent research has highlighted how some countries of the global north, including the United States between 2007 and 2015, have made some progress on climate mitigation policies (Mildenberger 2020). However, tremendous gaps exist between existing climate mitigation commitments and the dramatic scale-down in emissions that is necessary to keep warming to an acceptable level. In a context in which few countries have made commitments to mitigate climate change, it is important for us to understand how a few countries have managed to become leaders in efforts at reducing emissions.

Over the past several decades, the tiny nation of Costa Rica has emerged as a climate "leader." Costa Rica is a small nation in the Central American isthmus, nestled between Nicaragua and Panamá (see figure 1.1). Costa Rica is about the same size as the United States state of West Virginia and is home to just over five million people. In spite of its small size, Costa Rica hosts an impressive 5 percent of global biodiversity. It has also maintained the longest and most stable democracy in Latin America. One quarter of the country's land area is set aside in national parks and protected areas (Evans 1999). Since the mid-1980s, Costa Rica's extent of forest coverage has expanded (Breitling 2020). This means that Costa Rica has experienced a forest transition, changing from a net deforesting nation to a net reforesting one (Jadin, Meyfroidt, and Lambin 2016). In recent years, Costa Rica has first set (and then surpassed several times) its own records for the number of days its electricity grid has run on renewable sources. In 2009, and for the first time ever, the Natural Resources Defense Council added the entire nation of Costa Rica to its list of

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"BioGems," a list of exceptional natural spaces that historically had consisted of only small territories and individual species (NRDC 2009).

Amid the world's relative lack of ambitious, national climate mitigation policies, Costa Rica has charted its own path and made several major commitments since the 1990s to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 1996, Costa Rica initiated a program to pay landowners to preserve their lands if they enhanced climate mitigation. In so doing, Costa Rica created the world's "first nationwide and long-term program of payments for environmental services from tropical forests" (Arriagada et al. 2009, 344). Around the same time, it hosted some of the first climate mitigation projects in the global south that were financed by wealthier nations of the global north. Notably, Costa Rica pursued these projects even when many other nations of the global south, including China, declined this project-based finance. In 2007, at a global meeting of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) leaders, Costa Rica's then minister of the environment announced Costa Rica's pledge to adopt a national "Peace with Nature" commitment and to become "carbon neutral." Ahead of the 2015 Paris Conference of the Parties (COP) meeting, Costa Rican planners submitted an Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC), in which they pledged to reach "zero net emissions" by 2085 (Government of Costa Rica 2015, 10). In February 2019, Costa Rican officials met in the capital of San José and announced the aim to decarbonize the economy by 2050. There are important, albeit somewhat unclear, distinctions between these goals;[1] however, state planners have implied an increase of climate mitigation ambition in the move from carbon neutrality to zero net emissions to decarbonization.

The Climate Action Tracker (CAT), a scientific website that rates nations' climate mitigation objectives, includes Costa Rica in a group of just nine nations that are each "almost sufficient" with meeting the Paris Agreement's goal of a global 1.5 degree Celsius temperature increase (Climate Action Tracker 2024). This is the second highest (meaning second best, in terms of climate mitigation) ranking for a nation. As of this writing, the CAT does not consider any nation's policies to be compatible with meeting the goal of a 1.5 degree Celsius temperature increase.

Such ambitious mitigation commitments—including the goal to literally aim for zero [net emissions]—raise an important question: Are these proclamations merely greenwashing, or verbal commitments to reduce emissions without any substance to actually do so? It is difficult to track emissions

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Table 1.1
Total carbon dioxide emissions from Costa Rica including land use change and forestry (1990–2019)

Year	Carbon dioxide emissions in metric tons or kilotons
1990	5.34 Mt
1995	7.27 Mt
2000	7.41 Mt
2005	5.81 Mt
2010	6.64 Mt
2015	246.25 kt
2019 (last year available)	937.25 kt

(*Source:* Climate Watch 2023a)

Table 1.2
Total carbon dioxide emissions from Costa Rica excluding land use change and forestry (1990–2019)

Year	Carbon dioxide emissions in metric tons
1990	2.87 Mt
1995	4.81 Mt
2000	4.95 Mt
2005	6.27 Mt
2010	7.11 Mt
2015	7.54 Mt
2019 (last year available)	8.24 Mt

(*Source:* Climate Watch 2023a)

reductions that are caused by a particular policy (Mildenberger 2020, 6–7); however, if we look at Costa Rica's emissions data over time, some patterns emerge (see tables 1.1 and 1.2).

When including emissions from land use change and forestry (LUCF), Costa Rica's carbon dioxide emissions were lower in 2019 (the last year for which data are available) than they were in 1990 (see table 1.1). In 1990, carbon dioxide emissions were 5.34 Mt; in 2019, they were 937.25 kt.[2] This indicates Costa Rica's success in slowing deforestation as part of its forest transition (Jadin, Meyfroidt, and Lambin 2016).

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The picture, however, is complex. If we look at changes in Costa Rica's total carbon dioxide emissions excluding LUCF (see table 1.2), emissions have nearly tripled, increasing from 2.87 Mt in 1990 to 8.24 Mt in 2019.

These data indicate that Costa Rica appears to have at least a partially hopeful trajectory on climate mitigation. Costa Rica has curtailed land use emissions, has an electricity grid that runs predominantly on renewable sources of energy, and is one of just a tiny handful of nations that are deemed almost sufficient for helping to keep the world to a 1.5 degree C temperature increase. However, emissions from elsewhere in the economy are rising. The climate mitigation policies of the past few decades (the payments for environmental services [PES] program, "carbon neutrality," decarbonization) present a fascinating puzzle: Why have Costa Rican politicians committed to these policies when most other nations have dragged their feet on climate policy? Like many nations in the global south, Costa Rica contributes a negligible amount of greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere, 0.02% by 2023 estimates (Climate Watch 2023b). Costa Rican politicians would therefore seem to have little to no rationale to make these pledges. Why and how was Costa Rica able to make these pledges? What currently stands in the way of Costa Rican planners achieving lower emission rates? This book endeavors to answer these questions by investigating the process of climate mitigation policy formation in Costa Rica from the 1980s to the present.

The history of Costa Rica is instructive because it has made several major commitments to go green. This book investigates how this has been possible and who has led these efforts. Because mitigation policies like the ones Costa Rica has undertaken will be necessary on a much broader scale to minimize further warming, understanding the context and the process of mitigation policy in Costa Rica should help us understand climate policy elsewhere.

HOW UNIQUE VERSUS REPRESENTATIVE IS THE COSTA RICAN CASE?

Research on Costa Rica comes with the interesting question of how unique or representative the case is to the rest of Latin America, or elsewhere throughout the global south. Is Costa Rica in a class of its own, with lessons drawn from the case applicable only to this nation? Or is Costa Rica representative of some of the larger trends having to do with climate in the region, and will lessons from Costa Rica be relevant elsewhere?

On the one hand, Costa Rica is an unusual case. The country continues to have no standing army, and Costa Rica is home to the longest-lasting

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stable democracy in Latin America. Because of these reasons, a book about Costa Rica might be fascinating, but because Costa Rica is "an *extreme* or a *unique* case" (Yin 2009, 47), it might be argued that the Costa Rican situation is so particular that lessons learned from it hold little promise of informing climate policy elsewhere. Costa Rica does indeed "buck" the tide by being more "reformist" in its climate policy than some of its more "conservative" regional neighbors (Viola and Franchini 2018).

On the other hand, however, Costa Rica is representative of some broader trends, and specifically some broader climate trends, within the Latin American context. Lessons from Costa Rica are thus both relevant and helpful for understanding climate policy elsewhere, and perhaps for providing a way forward for climate policy in other contexts.

As discussed earlier, Costa Rica has reduced total carbon dioxide emissions between 1990 and 2019 when accounting for LUCF changes. This reflects a pattern in the region of reduced emissions from land use changes at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries (Edwards and Roberts 2015, 12). In addition, Costa Rica has seen rising emissions from transportation, also mimicking a pattern in Latin America (Edwards and Roberts 2015, 11–12). Costa Rica, like many nations in the region, relies heavily on hydropower, a renewable energy source, to fuel its electricity grid. Hydropower has made it possible for Costa Rica's electricity grid to make international headlines for running exclusively on renewable sources in recent years (Zúñiga 2020), though is not without its own social and environmental problems (Fletcher and Frece 2020; Edwards and Roberts 2015). Like other Latin American countries, Costa Rica has been slow to expand solar and wind capacity (Edwards and Roberts 2015, 54; Nandwani 2006). Therefore, in the broad pattern of its emissions, Costa Rica mimics other nations in Latin America.

Costa Rica is unusual because it is a highly developed and relatively low-income country (Mahoney 2010); however, Costa Rica is not immune to conflicts between development and environmental protection. Like the rest of the global south since the onset of globalization, environmental conflicts happen within Costa Rica's borders (Gould, Pellow, and Schnaiberg 2008). In recent years, these conflicts between development and the environment have often revolved around mining (Bebbington and Bury 2013; Bull and Aguilar-Støen 2015; Rudel 2018). In the mid-2000s, as commodity prices rose, many Latin American nations turned to the extraction of subterranean minerals, based on the economic opportunity they represented (Arsel,

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Hogenboom, and Pellegrini 2016). Costa Rican activists fighting against mining have been able to protest and have largely avoided the repression that some of their counterparts elsewhere in the region have faced (Holland 2020; Aguilar-Støen 2015). Yet the gold mining case at Las Crucitas was a major socio-environmental conflict (Broad and Cavanagh 2015; Holland 2020) that influenced the climate mitigation policymaking process. We will return to a discussion of the Crucitas case and its consequences in chapter 5.

There is a history of taking "lessons learned" from Costa Rica and applying them elsewhere. This happened with Costa Rica's PES program, which served as a model for other countries' programs (Pagiola 2008; Fletcher 2013). Costa Rican politicians have a long history of describing Costa Rica as a "laboratory," from which ideas and policies can be tested before being applied elsewhere (Boza, Jukofsky, and Wille 1995; Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020). Large environmental NGOs do this too, as they have historically treated Costa Rica as a "testing ground" and applied ideas developed there to other nations in the global south. As Hrabanski et al. (2013, 128) write, large environmental NGOs have promoted PES programs elsewhere in the global south using lessons learned from the Costa Rican case.

In review, while Costa Rica is unusual in some ways, it is also representative of several social and climate patterns in Latin America. It is therefore imperative to understand what has happened in Costa Rica and to try and take away transferable lessons if we are to arrest further global warming.

CENTRAL ARGUMENT AND CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this book, I investigate why the needle has moved on climate mitigation policy more in Costa Rica than in other nations and why that needle has moved in certain eras but not others. I argue that the case of climate mitigation policy development in Costa Rica is a result of a green elite mobilization within a historical context of a more egalitarian class structure.

Why have Costa Rican planners pursued a set of ambitious climate mitigation policies? Recent research reveals the value here of historically informed case studies (Stephenson, Sovacool, and Inderberg 2021). I take that approach in this book, and I find that climate policies differ across national contexts due to different historical and evolving class structures. I argue that historically Costa Rica has had a relatively more egalitarian class structure, which enabled elites to make more services available for more people. These public

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good investments enhanced social development. Because of Costa Rica's relatively high levels of social development, state planners have been freed up to pursue ambitious climate mitigation policies. Elites in more historically unequal societies tend to avoid investing in the public good and have less inclination to work for their citizens and thus raise the level of development. Chapter 2 explores the historical development of Costa Rica's more egalitarian class structure and the pattern of good governance that emerged from that context.

While chapter 2 answers the "why" question for us, it leaves unanswered the questions about *who* has adopted climate mitigation policies and *how* these changes have come into being. Most other social science research on the national drivers of climate mitigation has been quantitative, cross-national, and cross-sectional (Dolsak 2001; Dolsak 2009; Fisher and Freudenburg 2004; Flagg 2015; Flagg and Rudel 2021; Zahran et al. 2007). This means that we lack a rich, qualitative description of the overtime and on-the-ground decision-making processes by which leaders in the global south succeed or struggle to reduce emissions. To explore these questions, we must pay closer attention to the various actors in Costa Rica's climate policy narrative. I argue that beyond Costa Rica's level of development, the members of a relatively unified elite subculture have developed the climate mitigation policies discussed in this book. Following the global economic shocks of the 1930s and 1940s, the central Costa Rican state incorporated the rising middle class. This not only helped Costa Rica eventually avoid the violence of state/military-led repressions of subservient workers that would characterize other Central American nations in the 1980s (Paige 1998), but it also gave rise to a largely urban, educated class of people who belong to Costa Rica's contemporary and relatively unified elite subculture. The people in this subculture, who move in and out of decision-making positions across institutions, have developed Costa Rica's climate policies. Thus, I call them the green elite. In chapter 3, we will look closely at why and how this subculture developed, why it matters for rapid policy action, and how some people in this subculture with transnational influence and exposure helped tip the scales in favor of certain climate mitigation policies at various policy moments.

Chapters 4–8 each analyze an era of Costa Rica's climate policy development. For the most part, these eras align with a particular president's term, and that tended to be how my interviewees referred to them. Across each chapter, we will see how the contextual and theoretical factors discussed early

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on in the book (levels of economic [in]equality, development, and a unified elite subculture) matter for explaining climate policy action in Costa Rica.

The chronological story begins, in chapter 4, in the late 1980s, a time when the global community was not generally concerned with climate mitigation policies. However, I show that in this era, the dynamics discussed earlier in the book—class structure and green elite dynamics—prepared the foundations of Costa Rica's recent climate mitigation policies. Costa Rica's freedom from political revolution gave the elite an opportunity to continue to invest in public goods. Though they had practically no budget for environmental concerns, leaders enacted important institutional restructuring that led to the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mines (MINEREM). According to my interviewees, this institutional restructuring improved planning possibilities for the parks and for the electricity grid. In addition, Costa Rica's political stability at this time allowed it to become a leader in debt-for-nature swaps, which helped reduce the country's outstanding debt from earlier in the decade. In addition, certain individual leaders had significant influence at this time. The most notable by far is Óscar Arias, who in 1987 received a Nobel Peace Prize, significantly and positively altering how foreigners would see Costa Rica for decades to come. The prize fostered growth in the ecotourism industry, for which Costa Rica would come to be internationally recognized. Finally, Arias selected Álvaro Umaña, a member of the green elite, to lead the newly established MINEREM. Umaña, an environmental engineer educated in the United States, brought a vision to the MINEREM that several interviewees credited with helping to move Costa Rican environmental policies in a progressive direction.

In chapter 5, we move to the mid-1990s, during the presidency of José María Figueres Olsen. People involved in environmental policymaking at this time described this era as one of enthusiasm and said there was a can-do attitude about climate initiatives in Costa Rica. At this time, Costa Rican officials (the first members of Costa Rica's green elite who were explicitly focused on climate change) pursued projects during the trial period for activities implemented jointly (AIJ), the first opportunities for nations in the global north to finance emission reduction projects in the global south. The passage of the 1996 Forestry Law 7575 also established the first link between forestry and climate mitigation, with the ability to pay landowners for the mitigation service that their land provided. I argue that the needle moved on climate at this time because of three interrelated factors. First, Costa Rica

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had achieved high social development and high visibility among international observers. Second, within this context, a consolidated green "team," as referred to by interviewees, came together and devoted themselves to climate issues. And third, José María Figueres himself—his background and his biography—provided a nudge for policymakers to pursue climate policies at this time. Some people called Figueres the first president to discuss sustainability, despite the fact that prior president Rafael Ángel Calderón Fournier attended the 1992 Earth Summit.

Chapter 6 focuses on the second administration of former president Óscar Arias Sánchez, which spanned 2006–2010. During this administration, Costa Rican officials announced the country's intention to adopt a "Peace with Nature" pledge, and in so doing, drew a clear link back to Arias's first term (1986–1990), when he received a Nobel Peace Prize. The "Peace with Nature" pledge included a commitment for Costa Rica to "go carbon neutral" by 2021—the date of Costa Rica's bicentennial anniversary of independence. I argue that the two factors of major importance in this book—relative economic egalitarianism and elite dynamics—both mattered for nudging climate mitigation policy forward at this time. The green elite was inspired to adopt the Peace with Nature and carbon neutrality commitments because it seized on the opportunity of President Arias's return to the presidency. In addition, Costa Rica's elevated level of development on the one hand inspired members of the green elite to adopt a pledge that was more novel, more ambitious, than other nations, but on the other hand, rising economic inequality at this time (coinciding with the Great Recession) gave way to a major domestic environmental mining dispute. As inequality increased, environmental protections came under threat, and as a result, enthusiasm for climate mitigation initiatives waned.

The most recent period, 2015–2019, is covered in chapter 7. In this era, we see Costa Ricans on the global stage, coupled with rising domestic tensions. I argue that the small Costa Rican green elite moved quickly to help nominate a fellow Costa Rican (Christiana Figueres) to the highly visible position of UNFCCC executive secretary and that this had trickle-down effects that helped motivate Costa Rican planners to ramp up their climate mitigation ambition again. In addition, the young, charismatic president elected in 2018, Carlos Alvarado, possessed values that led to the country's decarbonization pledge. Interviewees discussed how the decarbonization plan built on previous policies and Costa Rican institutions, dating as far back as the

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1980s. However, serious domestic economic issues, including a months-long strike, made it hard for climate planners at this time to center the climate mitigation initiatives in domestic Costa Rican life. My conclusion, chapter 8, reviews lessons of the book and presents hypotheses developed from the Costa Rican case that may be taken up elsewhere.

ACTORS AND THEIR MOTIVATIONS

Who are the actors in this story, and what are their motivations? As has happened elsewhere, governance in Costa Rica shifted over the course of the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century from being almost exclusively state run to a more "hybrid" form of a welfare state model and a neoliberal model (Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020). When it comes to climate policymaking, state actors remain central to the story. The state—meaning the Ministry of the Environment, the Climate Change Center (an office under the ministry), and the presidency—has historically announced the nation's climate policies, represents Costa Rica at the international COP meetings, and writes the national plans that followed climate mitigation pledge announcements. The main policy ideas analyzed in this book—the PES program, the carbon neutrality pledge, and the decarbonization plan—have been programs carried out by state actors. Of course, external actors have provided essential support to these programs. As just one example, the World Bank provided significant resources to fund the PES program (Matulis and Fletcher 2020). Foreign governments have also supported the Costa Rican state offices devoted to climate.

Other research on Costa Rica reveals that state actors also led in the development of the national parks system and biodiversity protection (Evans 1999; Steinberg 2001). As discussed in these works and here in this book, the state relies on domestic actors who are not in official state offices or capacities (e.g., academics) to assist in environmental policymaking, including climate mitigation. Highly educated people who advise official state actors work (or have worked) in other sectors (civil society, academia, industry, and other sectors). There is a high degree of fluidity across institutional contexts in Costa Rica. This makes studying "the state" in Costa Rica different from doing so in the global north, where there may be clearer professional distinctions between people in the state versus civil society versus industry and where "the state" can perhaps be more easily distinguished from other sectors (Fisher 2004).

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As such, the main actors in this story are people who worked in, or for, or who partnered with the state at some point to enable climate policy change. Although these actors tend not to have significant economic power, they do influence outcomes (Khan 2012). Therefore, I call them the green elite.

Why do these Costa Rican actors make such commitments? When many countries, including the United States, have failed to reduce emissions, it would seem to make sense for state actors in Costa Rica to be obstinate in their opposition to emission reduction commitments. State planners could claim that they deserve to develop in the fossil fuel–intensive style pioneered by countries in the global north. As we will see in the following chapter, Costa Rica's high level of social development enables members of the elite to consider bold action on climate mitigation. People involved with these processes in Costa Rica—and in some other Latin American nations—see an opportunity for climate action from middle-income developing countries, and they see that their actions might serve as a bridge to better connect the divided north and south (Edwards and Roberts 2015). Though Costa Rica is not a wealthy country, planners there believe they can make progress on climate mitigation even with their limited economic capacity. Some planners even believed Costa Rica's actions would inspire other nations to also reduce emissions. Costa Rican state actors see an opportunity to lead, to be a model for other countries in terms of climate mitigation (Edwards and Roberts 2015). Again, there is a long history of this kind of rhetoric in Costa Rica (Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020).

What about civil society? Across Latin America, Edwards and Roberts (2015) write that civil society has been slow to take up climate change. Costa Rican civil society is not a main actor in this story. As we will see, however, domestic civil society has nevertheless been very active, particularly in fighting against mining issues, during the period analyzed in this book (see also Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020). Global civil society has also not led Costa Rica's climate mitigation policy process. Looking back to the development of Costa Rica's PES program, Hrabanski et al. (2013, 128) write that while large international environmental NGOs helped establish the parks, they did not help develop the PES program. Large environmental NGOs provided assistance to Costa Rica in the 1970s and 1980s as a developing country (Hrabanski et al. 2013), but Costa Rica became too developed by the 1990s to merit further assistance from international aid. This, being the beginning of the contemporary timeline for Costa Rican climate mitigation

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policy, meant that it has been both state actors and others, typically highly educated, domestic, urban professionals working with the state, who have driven the decisions and processes around climate mitigation.

RESEARCH METHODS

Relatively little scholarship on climate policy development has included data from interviews conducted with elite actors. Recently, however, other scholarship has emphasized how essential it is to understand the role of elite decisions and influence for environmental outcomes. Research on environmental justice has expanded to include the perspectives of both people in low-income, marginalized communities and economic elites but not political elites (Farrell 2020). Research on elite organizations and networks discusses the importance of understanding the role of elite actors but has not included data from interviews with elites (Downey 2015). This book's uniqueness relies on key informant interviewing conducted with people on the ground in high-profile positions in Costa Rica, including a half dozen former ministers of the environment. Throughout the text, I refer to respondents by pseudonyms to protect their identities. Another source of data for this project consists of news articles, speeches, and Costa Rican domestic policy documents collected since 2013 that shed light on the development of climate mitigation policies in Costa Rica. I include an extended discussion of the research methods and table A.1 with information about my respondents in the Methodological Appendix.

Analyses of field notes and archival documents are woven together to produce a narrative of climate mitigation policy development in Costa Rica, stretching from the late 1980s through to the present. Within this narrative, I pay special attention to four historical moments when the needle moved on climate, and these moments form the basis of chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. I used the research method of process-tracing to construct this narrative. This method "attempts to identify the intervening causal process—the causal chain and causal mechanism—between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable" (George and Bennett 2005, 206). Throughout this book, I show how a set of historically prominent Costa Rican officials moved climate policy forward at particular moments, often capturing the attention of an international audience. While this book presents a "story presented in the form of a chronicle that purports to throw

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light on how an event came about," it is not an atheoretical chain of events (George and Bennett 2005, 210). As the next two chapters will show, there are several variables that help explain the outcomes of interest—Costa Rica's ambitious climate mitigation policies. However, since process tracing is helpful for both "theory testing and theory development," I also develop several hypotheses of my own from this case study that might offer lessons for other nations pursuing climate mitigation (George and Bennett 2005, 207). I include these in the final chapter.

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2 HISTORICAL CLASS DYNAMICS AS A DRIVER OF CLIMATE POLICIES

> "You don't need to be a developed country, because we're not . . ." but you've got to have human rights and water to get to this goal. "It's not going to happen in Haiti."
>
> —Field notes from interview with Manuel, a biologist and civil society advocate

There used to be a belief that while people in poorer, so-called developing, nations cared about local environmental problems that affected them directly, including water, soil, and air contamination, these same people cared less about global environmental problems like climate change than their counterparts in the wealthier global north. The thinking, accepted for some years, was that until residents of poorer countries had their basic needs met, they could not experience a shift in their values that would prompt them to care about global environmental problems such as climate change (for a review of the objective problem subjective values thesis, see Brechin 1999). This idea has been discredited, as many studies have documented high levels of concern about climate change and other environmental issues among residents in the global south (Brechin and Kempton 1994; Brechin and Bhandari 2011). In several studies, residents in the global south display even higher levels of concern about climate change than their counterparts in the global north (Brechin and Bhandari 2011; Leiserowitz et al. 2022).

Although national levels of development do not determine civilians' levels of concern about climate change, development does matter because it shapes nations' abilities to mobilize on behalf of people and the planet and

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to adopt climate mitigation goals. Wealthy and highly developed nations have made some of the most ambitious climate mitigation policies. High-income nations of the European Union (EU), for example, made strict emission reduction commitments ahead of the 2015 Paris Conference of the Parties meeting (Flagg and Rudel 2021; Tobin et al. 2018).

While nations in the G77+China united around common interests including third-world solidarity at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Roberts and Parks 2007), developing nations' domestic policy positions since then have varied widely. Both in terms of domestic climate policies and in terms of which negotiating blocs they join, Latin American nations have adopted diverse climate policy positions. Costa Rica has made several climate mitigation pledges and adopted a noncombative stance on global cooperation for climate policy. As in some other Latin American nations, Costa Rican leaders believe that the global north's lack of ambitious climate mitigation policies should not prevent nations in the south, who were largely not responsible for filling the atmosphere with heat-trapping gases, from adopting their own emission reduction policies (Edwards and Roberts 2015; Watts and Depledge 2018). However, other nearby and highly biodiverse countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia joined the ALBA bloc (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas), which takes a more assertive approach, arguing that developed nations owe these countries a "climate debt," sometimes rejecting the UNFCCC approach and prioritizing discussions of global social inequities. What explains these differences?

This chapter began with a quote from Manuel, a biologist who also had a background in civil society advocacy and who had worked for the government. After we had been talking for a while, I asked him why Costa Rica had made a carbon neutrality pledge. As he put it, it's not necessary to be a highly developed country to adopt a neutrality pledge. But, at the same time, he added, "It's not going to happen in Haiti," a politically unstable country that has consistently ranked as the poorest in the region, and one of the poorest in the world (World Bank 2023a). As Manuel's quote argues, part of why Costa Rica has been able to make climate mitigation commitments is its elevated level of development. Costa Rica has historically ranked high (Mahoney 2010) and continues to outrank its neighbors across measures of social well-being. As shown in tables 2.1 to 2.5, Costa Rica, since 1990 and to the present, consistently surpasses its neighbors in measures of life expectancy, literacy, safe drinking water access, and income per capita. The

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Table 2.1
Life expectancy at birth in years in Costa Rica and select other Latin American nations

	Life expectancy 1990	Life expectancy 2000	Life expectancy 2010	Life expectancy 2020
Costa Rica	76.63	77.59	78.67	79.28
Ecuador	69.35	72.84	75.43	72.15
Bolivia	56.42	62.35	66.16	64.47
Guatemala	62.47	67.45	70.88	71.80
Nicaragua	63.10	67.23	72.01	71.80
Honduras	65.24	68.66	71.09	71.46
El Salvador	62.55	69.87	71.85	71.06

(*Source:* The World Bank 2023b)

Table 2.2
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births in Costa Rica and select other Latin American nations

	Infant mortality rate 1990	Infant mortality rate 2000	Infant mortality rate 2010	Infant mortality rate 2020
Costa Rica	14	11.1	9.1	6.7
Ecuador	42.3	24.7	16.3	11.1
Bolivia	83.9	55.8	33.2	20.9
Guatemala	59.5	41	28.7	20.2
Nicaragua	50.9	31.6	20.4	12.1
Honduras	45.2	30.6	20.9	14.7
El Salvador	46.3	27.4	16.5	11.1

(*Source:* The World Bank 2023b)

Table 2.3
Literacy rate of total adult population (percent of people ages 15 and above) in Costa Rica and select other Latin American nations[1]

	Literacy rate 2000	Literacy rate 2010	Literacy rate 2020
Costa Rica	94.87	97.41	98.04
Ecuador	90.98	91.85	93.63
Bolivia	86.72	92.23	93.85
Guatemala	69.10	78.27	83.35
Nicaragua	76.68	. . .	. . .
Honduras	80.01	84.76	88.51
El Salvador	. . .	84.49	89.99

(*Source:* The World Bank 2023b)

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Table 2.4
Percent of people in total population using safely managed drinking water in Costa Rica and select other Latin American nations

	Safe drinking water 2000	Safe drinking water 2010	Safe drinking water 2020
Costa Rica	76.29	79.28	80.52
Ecuador	58.20	63.07	66.83
Bolivia	. . .	. . .	. . .
Guatemala	46.78	51.69	55.83
Nicaragua	47.85	51.67	55.52
Honduras	. . .	. . .	. . .
El Salvador	. . .	. . .	. . .

(*Source:* The World Bank 2023b)

Table 2.5
Adjusted net national income per capita (in current United States dollars) in Costa Rica and select other Latin American nations

	Income per capita 1990	Income per capita 2000	Income per capita 2010	Income per capita 2020
Costa Rica	1622.72	3378.51	7412.92	10639.88
Ecuador	1080.16	1006.06	3646.45	4197.13
Bolivia	581.49	844.86	1565.68	2617.57
Guatemala	763.91	1490.62	2395.99	3953.16
Nicaragua	212.21	870.35	1305.57	1635.22
Honduras	825.05	964.35	1624.93	2085.01
El Salvador	820.73	1813.96	2615.38	3128.23

(*Source:* The World Bank 2023b)

country also has comparatively low infant mortality rates. How has this level of development happened? We look to history for answers.

Climate policies differ across national contexts due to diverse historical and evolving class structures. I argue that Costa Rica's relatively more egalitarian class structure has encouraged the elite to invest in public goods (Battig and Bernauer 2009) and thus display good governance. Under good governance, the state acts on behalf of the non-elite, rather than exclusively for members of the elite. These investments, over time, have raised the level of development in Costa Rica and have enabled state planners to pursue

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ambitious climate mitigation policies. In contrast, the elite in more unequal societies tends to invest in itself or in particularly well-placed families or factions (Van de Walle 2001). In these contexts, climate mitigation pledges are less likely.

To understand the historical development of Costa Rica's class structure and the pattern of good governance that has followed, it is important to understand Costa Rica historically and in comparison with some of its Latin American neighbors. We will see how class and governance differences across nations foster different climate policy outcomes. As other scholars writing about the predictors of nations' low-carbon ambitions have recently written, contemporary, national ambitions to reduce emissions are "in part shaped by [nations'] past resource development choices and political arrangements, including those that predate global concern about climate change" (Stephenson, Sovacool, and Inderberg 2021, 10). Class dynamics develop slowly over time. Historical class dynamics is one driver of socio-ecological change (Collins et al. 2011). However, as the following chapter will show, historical and evolving class structures—while essential for explaining Costa Ricans' ability to pursue climate mitigation—do not entirely account for when, why, and how Costa Rican planners have adopted their climate mitigation policies. To more accurately explain exactly how these policies have been developed and introduced, we must also look to the role of Costa Rica's unified elite subculture as it developed over time.

THE COLONIAL ERA IN COSTA RICA AND IN COMPARATIVE-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

During the earliest years of the colonial era, the land now known as Costa Rica remained "peripheral" to the Spanish colonial project (Mahoney 2010). Costa Rica's peripheral status was the result of its only moderately organized Indigenous societies, its general lack of mineral wealth, and its great distance from major colonial cities (Evans 1999; Mahoney 2010, 116–117). These factors meant that Spanish colonial institutions had less of an imprint on Costa Rica than they did elsewhere (Mahoney 2010). Why? Places with less hierarchical societies were harder for colonists to conquer and control. In contrast, among highly organized groups like the Aztec in current-day México, a small group of colonizers quickly gained control of a subservient class, from whom they could extract labor and surplus value (Mahoney 2010).

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Costa Rica and most of Central America (except Guatemala) remained "peripheral" for the entire colonial era (until the early 1800s). As a colonial periphery, or "backwater," pre-independence Costa Rica has sometimes been (mis)understood as a place with egalitarian levels of poverty and a preponderance of yeoman farmers who, although living in poverty, were the "better" kind of people and enjoyed a peaceful existence. This (incorrect) image of early Costa Rica as a place of rural egalitarianism has sometimes been described as the bedrock of Costa Rica's late twentieth-century stable democracy (Paige 1998; Gudmundson 1986). Gudmundson (1986) refutes these claims about Costa Rican egalitarianism in the late colonial period, using historical evidence to show that at this time there was economic inequality and professional diversity in people's employment choices. In other words, although the Spanish institutions did not make much of an imprint here, it was not a classless society. This matters because post-independence success (in economic and social development) is a result of deliberate interventions, rather than a natural outgrowth of an imagined Costa Rica that has always been home to the "better" sort of people (Mahoney 2010, Gudmundson 1986). At the end of the colonial era, there was not, however, the entrenched, embedded legacy of colonial institutions.

Costa Rica's colonial experience differed from that of other nations. Consider Ecuador. Today Costa Rica and Ecuador share some important features. Both countries are recognized internationally as ecotourism hotspots—Ecuador for the Galápagos Islands and Costa Rica for its national parks and preserves. Despite these points of similarity, Costa Rica and Ecuador almost could not be more different in terms of the two nations' economic and social development indicators (Mahoney 2010; see tables 2.1–2.5) and in their climate policies. Costa Rica has adopted many voluntary mitigation pledges. While Ecuador has tried to adopt some policies that would be beneficial in terms of climate mitigation, it remains a member of the more combative, social justice–oriented ALBA bloc (Edwards and Roberts 2015).

Much of the explanation for the climate policy differences between these two nations has to do with their different colonial experiences, the class structures that developed from those experiences, and the states' patterns of governance during the last half century. For example, while Costa Rica benefited from Spanish institutions' relative neglect of the territory, Ecuador suffered from Spanish colonialism's more active involvement. Ecuador experienced a deep colonial influence during the first (mercantilist) colonial era,

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in which "maximizing wealth generation in the short run" was colonists' primary objective (Mahoney 2010, 21). Mahoney (2010) adds some details to help us understand the class structure in countries like, and including, Ecuador: "The principal beneficiaries are an aligned set of political and economic elites, the latter including monopolistic merchants and wealthy landed classes. These elites sit atop and actively uphold a rigidly hierarchical society in which the vast majority cannot advance" (21). This uneven class structure was perpetuated in the early days of the textile industry in the city of Quito with poor Indigenous people working in the industry's productive factories. By 1700, Ecuador resembled a two-class system (Mahoney 2010, 112–113).

The later, liberal, era of colonialism (1700 to early 1800s) offered a chance for Ecuador's class structure to change course. However, this change proved elusive. Although the area in and around Quito had enjoyed (uneven) economic success during the early stage of colonialism, during the later stage, Quito's main hold on textile production was ruptured, as new materials from elsewhere flooded the market. Although the coastal region of Guayaquil had a robust economy, this was limited to the coast and did not extend inward, where Indigenous groups remained subjugated. As the textile dominance declined, and coastal wealth could not be extended outside that region, inequality increased as classes came to be divided (again) along a different resource: land. Indigenous peoples once again were the subservient labor force that the newly landed elite relied on. Forced labor and debt peonage remained common practices. This context of severe economic inequality and a subservient Indigenous labor force presented barriers to Ecuador's development, both social and economic, for many years to come. A lack of liberal institutions to override these economic injustices remained elusive in Ecuador.

In contrast, during the precolonial time in Costa Rica, estimates are that "hundreds of thousands" of Indigenous people lived in contemporary Costa Rica and Panamá (Mahoney 2010, 93), and many of them settled in the central valley. Early Spanish movements into this area led to a late sixteenth-century pandemic that significantly reduced the size of the Indigenous population in the central valley (Mahoney 2010, 99). By the close of the seventeenth century, the Indigenous population in Costa Rica "had largely disappeared," with small groups scattered across the landscape (Mahoney 2010, 100). Since there wasn't a lot of money to be made from such an Indigenous population and since Costa Rica largely served as a place through which valuable goods

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from elsewhere passed, the Spanish population at this time was also tiny. Smaller Indigenous groups that settled along Costa Rica's southeastern shorelines were more successful in fighting off Spanish invasion attempts. This is largely where the relatively small number of contemporary Indigenous Costa Ricans live today, far from the capital of San José and other centrally located cities (Pearce 2023; Jordan 2021).

Development possibilities were relatively open for most Central American nations (except Guatemala) in the years after national independence because they had maintained their status as colonial peripheries or "backwaters" during the entire colonial era (Mahoney 2010, 194). Yet, Costa Rica was as Indigenous as its neighbors (Mahoney 2010, Paige 1998). Why then, in the long run, has Costa Rica far surpassed these nations in terms of economic development, social development, and now climate policy ambition (see tables 2.1–2.5)? The events of the early days of Costa Rican independence begin to help us answer this question.

After gaining independence in 1821, Central American political leaders established the Federation of Central America (1823–1838). During the years of the Federation, Costa Rica continued the "peripheral" status it had held during the colonial era; again, this peripheral status served Costa Rica well (Mahoney 2010, 193). The Costa Rican elite, composed of "traditional aristocratic families, usually of pure Spanish descent, from the colonial and republican periods, and of newer European immigrants who arrived in Central America to take advantage of the economic advantages provided by the coffee boom" (Paige 1998, 15), took on early liberal reforms because they were "freed up" from the internecine battles that overwhelmed their neighbors. Mahoney (2010) adds that liberal reforms never took place in other similarly situated Central American countries because these countries experienced conservative resurgences as a consequence of the wars they were fighting (195).

Because it avoided war and enjoyed the "seclusion" of the (eventually) fragmented and combative Federation of Central America, Costa Rica was able to take a different path from nations with similar demographic characteristics and natural resource endowments (El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras). Instead of recovering from a political shakeup in the aftermath of the war for independence, Costa Ricans and Costa Rican political leaders turned their attention to the development of the coffee economy, an investment that would shape the next one hundred years of Costa Rican life.

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FIGURE 2.1
A map of Costa Rica.

THE COFFEE ECONOMY

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, coffee export economies took root throughout Latin America, and this development profoundly influenced Costa Rican class relations in the postcolonial period.

Costa Rica became a "virtual monoculture" of coffee in the 1800s (Roseberry 1995, 15). Since the earliest days, coffee cultivation has happened in the *Meseta Central*, or Costa Rica's central valley (see figure 2.1), which furthered the settlement of this area (Gudmundson 1995; Kutschbach 1995). In other countries, coffee cultivation was more spread out; this had the effect of distancing cultivators from political and economic elites (Kutschbach 1995).

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The geography of coffee cultivation had long-term influences on the development of Costa Rica's elite subculture. To this day, the area of coffee cultivation remains the most densely settled part of the country. Power—economic and political—has, since the earliest days of Costa Rica, been concentrated in the fertile central valley (Peeler 1992). In the next chapter, we will see how this geography matters for climate policy outcomes.

Some coffee export countries were economically successful because of the scale of production; Brazil, for example, produced an amount of coffee that dwarfs the amount produced in Costa Rica. However, part of what helped Costa Rica succeed in the early days of the coffee market was that it found its niche in producing "milds" for European customers (Roseberry 1995, 12). In time, coffee made Costa Rica the wealthiest country in Central America (Peeler 1992).

Economies based on the growth and development of agricultural exports have long been theorized to doom those nations to "subordinate positions in an international division of labor and thereby to underdevelopment and a rigid social structure" (Font 1990, 273; see also Wallerstein 2004). Export economies face social and environmental costs from these extractivisms (Gudynas 2020). This is why low-income, developing nations in the global south historically were not expected to act first to limit greenhouse gas emissions (Roberts and Parks 2007). Costa Rica was one of the earliest countries in the region to experience the coffee "boom." This could have thrown Costa Rican development into a downward spiral, making future prospects of development dim.

While many nations in Latin America became dependent on coffee (Roseberry 1995; see also Gudynas 2020), there were significant cross-national differences that could temper or exacerbate the ups and downs of the coffee economy and could influence what those gains and losses meant for people's lives. As Roseberry (1995) puts it, the "social relations" across diverse coffee export countries were "fundamentally different" (6). How did Costa Rica's economy—although vulnerable to the kinds of underdevelopment that can plague export economies in the global south—produce a more egalitarian land division and foster the kinds of good governance we see in the country's recent climate mitigation pledges?

From the earliest days of coffee cultivation, members of the Costa Rican elite privatized land for coffee cultivation; these decisions created a class of

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small landholders that endured from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s. The process to privatize land began in Costa Rica as early as the 1820s and was not replicated elsewhere in the region until several decades later (Mahoney 2010, 193). It is worth noting that these decisions disadvantaged members of Indigenous communities. Paige (1998, 14) writes that Costa Rican liberal revolutionaries in the 1840s "dispossessed traditional Indian communities," which led to a vast increase in wealth for non-Indigenous members of society and the loss of land and tradition for Native peoples. Tracts held by landholders were small, reflecting the labor-intensive pattern of coffee agriculture.

Private land enclosure represented a departure from pre-independence times, as only a fraction of people held land privately during the colonial and pre-coffee period (Gudmundson 1986, 33). As a result of state decisions to break up land, Costa Rican coffee production came to be "overwhelmingly in the hands of small growers who used mostly family labor" (Mahoney 2010, 194). During the first coffee boom, in the mid-nineteenth century, the elite was restricted from increasing its land ownership by high rates of peasant land ownership (Gudmundson 1986, 74). This comparatively more egalitarian distribution of land and resources was not the result of Costa Ricans being more white, or less Indigenous, than their neighbors (Mahoney 2010). Nor was it the result of an egalitarian economy before coffee (Gudmundson 1986). Rather, it was specific liberal elite decisions that created a whole class of small landholders, and the elite was able to do this since it had avoided the tumult of war and the conservative backlash that followed war among other countries in the region (Mahoney 2010).

As Gudmundson (1986) writes, "In any comparative context, early Costa Rican land-tenure patterns with coffee were little concentrated and remained so for a long time" (81). What happened elsewhere? While Costa Rica began to divide up land and promote the growth of a landholding class as early as the 1820s, similarly situated and former colonial backwater countries that eventually developed coffee export economies (e.g., Nicaragua and El Salvador) did not experience the division of formerly communal land into private land until later in the nineteenth century, delaying the consequences of that process (Mahoney 2010, 193). The elite in El Salvador did not make private property "the only legal form of land ownership" until the early 1880s (Paige 1998, 106). This initiated a process of land expropriation that booted people

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off the communal lands on which they had settled, exacerbated the nation's proletariat and semi-proletariat, and helped instigate the insurrections that would plague the country in the years to come.

By the mid-twentieth century, a greater percentage of the land for planting and coffee production was held by family and sub-family farmers in Costa Rica than elsewhere (Paige 1998, 60–61). To be clear, these sub-family farmers were not wealthy. They were poor, but they were not a subservient labor class. There was also an active group of coffee processing estates in Costa Rica, though they did not control people, as estates in Guatemala did, nor did they control nearly as much land as estates elsewhere did (Paige 1998). Clearly, government decision-making in a peaceful context helped develop a class structure with a more empowered (and not proletarianized) workforce.

There is one other feature that matters here too. The idea of an imagined "nation" of homogenous workers also encouraged elite decisions at this time to further empower landowners, and ultimately to create good governance. There was a powerful myth of people from Costa Rica being homogenous and racially "white" that took root during this time and facilitated practices of good governance. As Mahoney (2010) writes, "Beginning in the late colonial and early independence periods, national myths were most effectively constructed to portray the population as a single homogenous and mostly European group . . . In Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, in short, the legacy of the colonial period was societies that could be and would be imagined as ethnically pure and of elite stock" (224).

With the near elimination of Indigenous peoples, and the granting of land to farmers who were envisioned as "white," a myth developed about the kind of people who lived in Costa Rica. As independence dawned in Costa Rica, so too did an idea about the kind of people who comprised the new nation. Paige (1998) adds that a "fierce racism" is an "indispensable part of the rural agrarian myth" (233).

Coffee made Costa Rica the wealthiest country in Central America, and the crop's first boom phase established two classes—the upper class, *la clase*, and a largely landed peasantry; however, the two classes were not that different from each other. As Gudmundson (1986) puts it, "The first coffee barons, the Moras and Montealegres, if not exactly men of the people, were anything but members of a haughty elite. . . . in the local context even the wealthiest were not as far removed from labor and the common man as they might

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have preferred. Wealth for these Costa Ricans meant thousands of pesos at most, not the hundreds of thousands and millions of their Mexican counterparts" (85). The Costa Rican coffee elite was not a landed elite (Paige 1998; Gudmundson, 1986, 68). Rather, *la clase* made its money from the commercial aspects of coffee and trade (Gudmundson 1986; Paige 1998). Members of the elite were relatively unified at this time and competed over their shared interests in the selling and processing of coffee. When elite conflicts arose between the 1830s and the 1880s, these conflicts "lacked clear socioeconomic or ideological lines of party identification," and this period saw the development of many liberal policies (Gudmundson 1986, 4).

What did members of the elite do in this context? They were relatively unified in their wealth-generating interests of coffee processing and exports; they were not all that different from the small landholders on whom they relied for coffee production; there was not a subservient, landless class of workers for them to rule over; and they were not recovering or trying to seize back power after the tumult of war. The coffee processing elite became the political elite at this time (Paige 1998). And in short, these elites turned their attention inward to national governance.

Underlying social processes, like historical class structure, influence human activities at the local level (Geist and Lambin 2002, 143). In our narrative, historical and evolving class structures gave way to particular styles of governance. As others have put it, the state reflects the society in which it is embedded (Migdal 2004). According to Mahoney (2010), in a context with many small landholders and an almost complete lack of a landed elite, "the extension of public goods could be viewed in positive-sum terms" (194). In other words, since reforms would help large segments of society and because people, on average, did not hold economic positions that were all that different from those of the elite, people in positions of influence were more inclined to extend public goods. In this way, a class structure with smaller gaps between the very wealthy and the very poor provided a fertile environment for an elite-led pattern of good governance through the generous distribution of public goods. In describing the pattern of governance in the late 1800s, Paige (1998) adds, "In distinct contrast to their counterparts elsewhere in the region, the Costa Rican elite did not use the legal and political orders to expropriate the land and labor of the population but sought instead to incorporate the lower classes gradually into the Costa Rican nation through legal citizenship and the extension of education and the franchise" (131).

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When there is a coming together of the political/economic elite and smallholder interests, an alternative economy can develop that promotes development even in the context of an agriculturally based society (Font 1990, 29). The political-economic elite made investments in the public welfare in order to raise up society. This led to increased capitalist development in parts of the western São Paulo coffee expansion region in Brazil (Font 1990), and it has done the same in central Costa Rica. This alternative economy that promoted development occurred in a specific region of Costa Rica, in the central plateau, in and around San José (see figure 2.1).

Major investments were made in education, finance, and infrastructure that would lift large portions of the population (Mahoney 2010, 194). Early in this process (late 1830s), we already see evidence of this. As Peeler (1992) writes, "As coffee came to dominate the economy, planters increasingly controlled the state and used some of the proceeds of the coffee export to further develop state capacities that served the interests of coffee cultivation and export (e.g., provision of road, railroad, and port facilities)" (88). While these actions served the interests of those in power, they not only assisted those people but also served the vital function of developing the economy and making further wealth generation possible.

Investments in the public good made Costa Rica visible to outsiders and attracted foreigners. Beginning as early as the mid-1800s, foreign scientists, drawn to the country's ecological richness, came to Costa Rica (Evans 1999). The presence of some scientists attracted other scientists to join them, such that by the early twentieth century, Costa Rica was "the center of scientific research in tropical America" (Evans 1999, 20). This will have consequences later on in the century, as Costa Rica's tropical ecological richness combined with its political stability encouraged foreign travel by both scientists and nonscientists in much greater numbers.

In the late nineteenth century, as the coffee processing elite entered politics, it continued to invest in development projects to "maximize the country's autonomy relative to strong external forces" (Peeler 1992, 88). For example, in the 1880s, "liberal reformers" invested in primary education for the citizenry. The coming decades saw significant increases in the number of formal years of schooling across the population, including for women and the poor (Gudmundson 1995, 132–133). Leaders elsewhere would have seen this investment as "nonsensical"; however, the elite in Costa Rica believed

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"the country would be strengthened by having a literate citizenry" (Peeler 1992, 89). A commercial bank and a land registry were also eventually created (Mahoney 2010, 193). In time, Costa Rica showed some ability to stand up to foreign sources of power. For example, the Costa Rican state was capable of "bargaining" with the United Fruit Company, while in other nearby states (e.g., Honduras), the company "was able to corrupt and control the state" (Peeler 1992, 88). Minor Keith, in 1871, began to build a railroad between Costa Rica's Atlantic Coast and San José, and planted bananas along the railroad lines, thus developing a kind of alternative economy along this coastline (Echeverri-Gent 1992).

In addition to establishing the late nineteenth-century program of public education, the elite "showed tolerance for other state activities that served broad sections of society, including providing access to credit for small farmers, infrastructure projects, and systems of justice that applied the role of law broadly" (Mahoney 2010, 194). This pattern continued into the twentieth century. President Calderón, with the support of the Assembly, passed a series of progressive laws, including a social security system, and amended the constitution in support of basic workers' rights (Hoivik and Aas 1981; Peeler 1992, 93; Wilson 1998, 31). Contemporary climate mitigation policies are another expression of this historical pattern of elite investment in development and the public good.

Although efforts were made to extend the provisions of services to more rural areas, these public good provisions primarily benefited people in urban locales (Wilson 1998, 106). In areas that were far from the *Meseta Central*, other actors stepped in. For example, along the Atlantic coast, transnational corporations ran the banana industry and relied on the labor of marginalized, West Indian immigrant workers (Echeverri-Gent 1992). This industry eventually became a major driver of deforestation (Vandermeer and Perfecto 2005). While the Costa Rican state held considerably more sway over the United Fruit Company than other nations (Peeler 1992), the coastal banana-growing region and the people living there suffered from being "out of sight, out of mind" (88). So, while these services and the social welfare state benefited many people in the central valley, it did not reach all members of the population evenly. This unevenness has had long-term consequences, which we will describe later on.

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CHALLENGES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Moving into the twentieth century, indicators of social and economic development increased significantly in Costa Rica between 1950 and 1980. However, the second half of the twentieth century also presented significant social, economic, and environmental challenges in Costa Rica. Costa Rica's brief political revolution began after the 1948 presidential election contest between former president Calderón and Otilio Ulate, a coffee elite and conservative who formed an unlikely alliance with Figueres and other similar-minded people who opposed Calderón's alliance with the Communist Party (Paige 1998). When the results showed that Ulate had won, Calderón and his supporters in the Assembly voted to throw out the election results and return Calderón to the presidency (Peeler 1992; Paige 1998). This event set off an intense six-week period of fighting, with José Figueres Ferrer, a successful farmer and long-time critic of government corruption (Boggs 2008), leading the fight against the Costa Rican state's weak armed forces. In a remarkable series of events, this in-fighting ended with a junta taking control of the country for eighteen months. Subsequently, there was a peaceful transfer of power to the rightful election winner, Ulate.

As Wilson (1998) writes, the junta helped "lay the legal and financial foundations for an increasingly interventionist state in both the economic and social spheres" (84). Among the junta's achievements are its creation of autonomous institutions[2] (AIs) to deliver services (e.g., electricity) to residents, nationalizing the banks, writing a new constitution, and abolishing the army (Wilson 1998; Paige 1998). For our story, what matters is that the changes initiated by the junta had the effect of "creating what were believed to be the necessary preconditions for industrialization"—these included investments in resources like energy, water, and telecommunications, as well as in "education, health, and income redistribution" (Wilson 1998, 85–86). All of these actions—begun by the junta and continued by politicians in various parties from the late 1940s through to the early 1980s—helped Costa Rica achieve significant improvements in social well-being and economic growth (Wilson 1998).

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, politicians encouraged the Costa Rican economy to diversify beyond coffee and bananas, agricultural products whose prices varied widely year over year (Wilson 1998, 88; Augelli 1989). By 1970, Costa Rica's economy was "significantly more diverse, prosperous,

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and open than it had been in 1950," relying increasingly on manufacturing, commerce, and the central government (Wilson 1998, 99). As part of this, poverty levels decreased. Under National Liberation Party (Partido Liberación Nacional, PLN) presidents in the 1970s, social services were expanded further to include things such as a social security system and a national health plan. Still higher rates of social well-being followed. Between 1950 and 1980, Costa Rica lowered rates of illiteracy, lowered the infant mortality rate, raised life expectancy, increased the percentage of the population with sewage disposal, increased the percentage of households with electricity, increased the number of physicians per capita, and dramatically raised the percentage of the population with health insurance (Wilson 1998, 106).

The diversification of the economy was not without environmental consequences. The cattle industry devastated Costa Rica's forest cover. Rates of deforestation rose in the early 1950s and remained high through the mid-1980s (Daniels 2010; Nygren 2000). As Augelli (1989) writes, "Between 1950 and 1984, the areas in Costa Rica used for farming and grazing increased more than 250% from 1,219,063 hectares to 3,070,643 hectares" (88). By the early 1980s, banana plantations and cattle pastures had driven Costa Rica's deforestation rates to some of the highest in the world, in part fueled by a growing demand for beef from consumers in the United States (Augelli 1989; Vandermeer and Perfecto 2005).

We see a theme common from earlier time periods: an interventionist state revealed itself again in this moment, as the government made several attempts to curtail deforestation. The passage of the 1969 forestry law represented a much needed, if still incomplete, state-led effort to slow deforestation (Evans 1999). The 1969 forestry law also established an early basis for the development of national parks. It established the National Parks Department within the Ministry of Agriculture (Evans 1999, 72), where it stayed until 1986. The parks expanded during the relatively prosperous, and economically stable, decade of the 1970s. Government support for the parks emerged from the belief that they would not only preserve national flora and fauna but also encourage tourism and scientific research (Evans 1999, 72). Substantial resources from abroad helped establish the parks, echoing Lewis's (2003) finding that United States–based and global multilateral donor agencies tended to favor giving environmental aid to stable democratic states.

By the early 1980s, Costa Rica had the highest deforestation rate in the world at about 4 percent of land deforested per year (Daniels 2010; Daniels

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et al. 2010; Evans 1999). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, regional and global debt crises set off an economic crisis throughout much of Latin America, including Costa Rica. The "disintegration" of the Central American Common Market (CACM) due to instability in Nicaragua and El Salvador, combined with the global fall of coffee prices and the rising cost of oil (Wilson 1998, 104), complicated economic matters in Costa Rica. By 1983, "Costa Rica's international debt had reached U.S.$4 billion, one of the largest per capita debts in the world" (Wilson 1998, 104). Costa Rica relied significantly on loans from international institutions in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While previous research has tended to emphasize the role of international financial institutions (IFIs) in Costa Rica's neoliberal turn, Wilson (1998) argues that the role of the institutions has been overstated, with much of the support for neoliberal policies coming from Costa Rican politicians, including purported liberals, themselves. With instability in the CACM, the Monge administration (1982–1986) helped steer the Costa Rican economy toward the production of nontraditional agricultural exports, including pineapples, shrimp and fish, and textiles (Wilson 1998, 123). By the mid-1980s, deforestation rates in Costa Rica slowed as the price of beef fell (Daniels 2010, 232).

The decades of the 1970s and 1980s were consequential in good and bad ways for Costa Rica. In a comparative perspective, however, Costa Rica far outpaced its neighbors in measures of social well-being and good governance from this time. Nicaragua and El Salvador experienced class-based economies that had been more uneven since the early postcolonial period, semi-proletariat classes that revolted for power, and violent revolutions again (Paige 1998). Costa Rican planners greatly expanded the percent of protected land area during the 1970s (Evans 1999). In contrast, in the late 1960s, Texaco discovered oil in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Lewis 2016, 31). Since then, the Ecuadorian economy has been an extractive society. This new extraction built on the extraction of surplus value from marginalized, low-income people that dates back to the colonial period (Mahoney 2010). Writing about Ecuador since the discovery of oil, Widener (2011) says Ecuador "mimics many petrostates. It has a centralized government, high degrees of corruption, unjust distribution of oil wealth, large external debt, and limited economic development outside of the oil industry" (54). Although support for resource extraction often rests on the promise of promoting future economic development and social well-being, these benefits are rarely realized (Gould, Pellow, and Schnaiberg 2008; Widener

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2011).[3] Although the Ecuadorian state made some investments in development during the early days of oil extraction, it was not able to turn it into a sustainable model of growth (Lewis 2016). Historically, Ecuadorian state officials have been undermined by the roles and power of economic elites in transnational corporations.

REGIONAL CLIMATE AND DEVELOPMENT COMPARISONS

We can see how the processes outlined in this chapter reveal themselves in Latin American nations' contemporary climate mitigation commitments. The World Resources Institute (WRI) publishes information on which nations make net-zero targets (Schumer 2021). As table 2.6 below shows, several nations across the region have made this commitment, with some adopting the more stringent goal of establishing a net-zero target in law or policy and others making a verbal commitment to reach net-zero emissions.

What can we discern from this table? The ideas presented in this chapter help us understand why certain countries have made these commitments and others have not. Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panamá, and Uruguay have made net-zero targets in their laws and policies or through verbal commitments. Of these six countries, four (Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay) were "mercantilist peripheries," meaning that early Spanish colonial efforts did not take root there (Mahoney 2010, 119). These four nations are also regional leaders in social development. Across the twentieth century, they consistently achieved high rates of literacy and life expectancy, while keeping under-five mortality rates low (Mahoney 2010, 222–223). Now, these nations have committed to climate mitigation as well.

Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay share another interesting feature. In these contexts, "beginning in the late colonial and early independence periods, national myths were most effectively constructed to portray the population as a single homogenous and mostly European group." Following the near elimination of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous-held land, leaders in these territories were able to imagine the remaining population "as ethnically pure and of elite stock" (Mahoney 2010, 224). As discussed in this chapter, in these contexts, where an ethnically subservient class is no longer present, perhaps due to its elimination, elite investments (e.g., education) proceeded in ways designed to lift up the remaining (visible) population. Elite decisions to invest in social welfare now incorporate climate mitigation.

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Four of these pledging nations (Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Panamá) belong to the regional climate bloc AILAC (Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean), which operates as a "middle ground" between the global north and the global south, arguing that while developed countries of the north should provide climate finance, all nations, not just the ones responsible for emitting the largest quantities of greenhouse gas emissions, should actively address climate change. As Watts and Depledge (2018) put it, "AILAC's approach is based on a framing of climate change less as a burden, and more as an opportunity" (8). This describes Costa Rican planners' approach well, as we will see in the coming chapters.

Costa Rica announced its pledge in 2019. It is possible that Panamá adopted its pledge in 2020 to mimic its northern neighbor. Flagg and Rudel (2021) found evidence of this neighboring effect of pledging in their analysis of nations' Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) plans. They found that several nations situated along the periphery of the European Union mimicked the mitigation ambition from the NDCs of their EU neighbors in their own plans.

Three island nations—Barbados, Dominican Republic, and Jamaica—have set net-zero targets in law or policy or made political pledges to reach net zero. Small, low-lying, and vulnerable nations have been among the staunchest advocates for steep emission reduction commitments, as well as for climate adaptation funding. These three nations are members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a group that has historically called for the most stringent emission reduction policies (de Águeda Corneloup and Mol 2014). Despite their minimal contribution to the global buildup of greenhouse gas emissions, these three nations are not the only AOSIS nations to have made climate mitigation pledges (see, for example, Brechin's 2016 work on Belize).

Brazil's 2020 net-zero commitment is perhaps the most confusing among those listed in this table. Brazil has displayed pendulum-like behavior related to climate change, at some moments helping to address the crisis and at others making matters worse (Viola and Franchini 2018; Edwards and Roberts 2015). Brazil's pledge occurred during a moment of climate action, but it is one that is likely to be much harder to enact on the ground.

Let us briefly return to a discussion of El Salvador and Ecuador, two nations profiled earlier in this chapter. Neither has made a net-zero target (see table 2.6). Good governance that benefits people and the environment has been difficult in El Salvador. As Bull, Cuéllar, and Kandel (2015) explain,

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Table 2.6
Cross-national comparison of net-zero targets across Latin America

Country	Year	Type of pledge	Motivation
Argentina	2020	Political pledge to reach net zero	High social development
Chile	2020	Net-zero target set in law or policy	High social development; also a member of AILAC
Colombia	2021	Net-zero target set in law or policy	A member of AILAC
Costa Rica	2019	Net-zero target set in law or policy	High social development; also a member of AILAC
Panamá	2020	Net-zero target set in law or policy	A member of AILAC Also, next to regional leader (Costa Rica)
Uruguay	2020	Political pledge to reach net zero	High social development
Barbados	2020	Political pledge to reach net zero	Member of AOSIS, vulnerable geography
Dominican Republic	2020	Net-zero target set in law or policy	Member of AOSIS, vulnerable geography
Jamaica	2020	Political pledge to reach net zero	Member of AOSIS, vulnerable geography
Brazil	2020	Net-zero target set in law or policy	Trying to be a climate leader (Edwards and Roberts 2015); pendulum-like behavior (Viola and Franchini 2018)

(*Source:* Schumer 2021)

one core reason why good governance to promote pro-environmental outcomes has been lacking in El Salvador is due to the "deep inequalities existing in the socio-economic system" (47). El Salvador is one of the Latin American nations that ranks lowest in several metrics of postcolonial social development (Mahoney 2010, 223; see table 2.1). Not surprisingly, ahead of the 2015 Paris COP meeting, planners in El Salvador made a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) plan that is not comparable with most other nations' plans (Flagg and Rudel 2021) given that the NDC is conditional on receipt of foreign financial assistance (Climate Watch 2022). This is understandable.

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It reflects the deeply economically uneven context in which planners found themselves and the need of the international community to aid in El Salvador's climate preparedness.

Rhetorically and ideologically, Ecuador has aligned itself with the ALBA negotiating bloc before and during recent COP meetings. ALBA nations have been very vocal about the intersection of climate justice and social justice. Edwards and Roberts (2015) explain that while member nations have taken different stances on climate, "As a critical voice in the negotiations, ALBA speaks for issues of injustice created by unequal climate impacts, unequal responsibility, unjust decision-making processes, and inadequate assistance and support by wealthy nations" (103).

The Ecuadorian government garnered international attention in 2007 when it supported the Yasuní-ITT initiative. The government agreed to stop granting oil drilling concessions in the Yasuní National Park if the international community donated half ($3.6 billion) of the projected gains ($7.2 billion) from drilling in this oil-rich park. This idea did not begin with government—it came from civil society. Environmental activists proposed the idea, and President Correa gave his support by bringing the proposal to the United Nations in 2007 (Lewis 2016). This plan would have allowed the country to "keep the oil in the soil" and avoid the massive increase in greenhouse gas emissions that would have been released from the extraction and burning of this petroleum. Ecuador received a tiny fraction of what it had asked for, nowhere near the necessary cost to offset the losses from avoiding drilling (Edwards and Roberts 2015; Lewis 2016). As a result, President Correa called off the initiative. Reports from 2019 reveal that the government gave the green light to multiple plans to initiate drilling in the park (Brown 2019).

This move reflects Ecuador's structural position in the global political economy. It relies on petroleum extraction for economic development. Given Ecuador's historically uneven class structure (Mahoney 2010), the failure of oil exploitation to enhance development (Lewis 2016), and because oil extraction exacerbated social inequality (Widener 2011), Ecuador faces crises related to both development and environmental protection. It therefore comes as no surprise that recent analyses reveal that Ecuador did not make an ambitious NDC plan to reduce emissions ahead of the 2015 Paris COP meeting (Flagg and Rudel 2021). These political-economic decisions about drilling do not necessarily reflect the preferences of Ecuador's citizens who, in an August 2023 referendum, voted overwhelmingly to avoid drilling

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for oil in the ecologically sensitive Amazon rainforest, near Indigenous tribes (Valencia 2023). What the future will look like in Ecuador remains unclear.

A LOOK AHEAD

This chapter answered for us the question of why—Why has Costa Rica made several climate mitigation commitments? In large part, this is because of events dating back to the colonial and postcolonial periods that created a comparatively more egalitarian class structure in Costa Rica than in other nearby nations. This relatively egalitarian class structure has facilitated a pattern of good governance, and we see evidence of this good governance from the nineteenth century to the present.

The political leaders profiled in subsequent chapters are directly related to the class-based egalitarianism discussed thus far. The dynamics of Costa Rica's evolving class dynamics do not only exist on an economic or societal level. They also are evident in, represented by, and built on by particular people. Certain Costa Rican families and people embody the historical class dynamics and good governance for which Costa Rica has come to be known. The Figueres family is the most obvious example of this. José "Don Pepe" Figueres Ferrer, remembered as the most prominent person to emerge from the mid-century civil war and junta settlement, represents Costa Rica's class-based egalitarianism. Through family ties, "Don Pepe" Figueres's children—particularly José María and Christiana—embody this Costa Rican progressiveness to both domestic and international audiences. Though his children might have the most direct way to embody and continue Don Pepe's legacy, they are not the only Costa Rican leaders to have done so. As we will see, Óscar Arias especially, and Carlos Alvarado to an extent, also perpetuate the political line of influence begun with Don Pepe. All of these leaders see the political gains, at home and increasingly in front of a global audience, of building on José Figueres Ferrer's earlier initiatives that began to brand Costa Rica as a progressive environmental leader.

In the forthcoming chapters, I focus this narrative directly on the people who have made Costa Rica's commitments. Who are they, and how have they carried out this work? By whom, and how, have they been influenced? The next chapter moves us closer to that goal by discussing how an elite subculture developed in Costa Rica and introducing us to the elites who helped lead Costa Rica's climate mitigation policies.

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3 THE GREEN ELITE: EVOLVING HISTORICAL DYNAMICS

> Everyone knows everyone. Whichever sector you're in (environment, energy, etc.) you know everyone in that sector.
>
> —Field notes from interview with Juan, a professor at the University of Costa Rica

Although levels of development influence nations' climate policy preferences (Roberts and Parks 2007), they do not—by themselves—fully account for nations' climate policy commitments. Costa Rica's elevated level of development is necessary but not sufficient for explaining its recent climate mitigation policies. While the previous chapter told us about the *why*, it doesn't tell us much about the *who* or the *how*.

As societies modernize, it is possible that they also undergo sustainable transformations. Ecological modernization theory posits that rather than slowing down the treadmill-like industrial production systems to slow or avoid further ecological collapse (Gould, Pellow, and Schnaiberg 2008), innovation should speed up to mitigate environmental problems (Fisher and Freudenburg 2001; Mol and Sonnenfeld 2000).

The classic version of ecological modernization theory highlights the role technological innovation plays in a society's transition to sustainable capitalism (Mol and Sonnenfeld 2000, 4). An understanding of innovation or changes in the political realm was often overlooked in early work on the theory. However, Fisher (2004) started to change this in her cross-national exploration of climate policy. She explored how interactions across key sectors of a society—the state, the market, science, and civil society—explained

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why the Netherlands and Japan ratified the Kyoto Protocol but the United States did not. A strong coalition between the fossil fuel industry and the state, for example, helped explain why the United States failed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. While this work incorporates an understanding of the political realm, it remains relatively impersonal because it focuses on the interactions across domestic interest groups (government, science, industry, and civil society). Fisher's (2004) work, and more recent work exploring mitigation among some countries in the global north (Mildenberger 2020), is helpful for exploring cross-national interest group relationships that lead to mitigation. But neither provides a specific enough narrative to explain how people in decision-making positions move the needle on climate policy. In addition, because ecological modernization theory was originally based on observations from highly developed nations of western Europe, it is unclear if it is applicable to nations in the global south. Evidence of ecologically modern transitions outside of the highly industrialized nations of western Europe has been weak (Frijns et al. 2000) or at best mixed (Sonnenfeld 2000).

The story of Costa Rica's climate mitigation policies since the 1980s is not a tale about the adoption of green technologies. Costa Rica has long been a leader in renewable energies (Wilde-Ramsing and Potter 2006) and has received much international attention over the past few years for its ability to source nearly 100 percent of its domestic electricity needs from renewable sources (Zúñiga 2020). While this context matters, it is incomplete for explaining Costa Rica's climate mitigation policy narrative. The Costa Rican story of climate mitigation policymaking has been shaped by elite-driven political processes. We need a more personalized and historical understanding of this greening process. In short, we need to open the analytical black box of the political innovation that ecological modernization entails. The case of Costa Rica provides an opportunity to do that.

As a societal-level theory, ecological modernization theory is helpful for explaining major cross-national policy differences (Fisher 2004; Fisher and Freudenburg 2001; Zahran et al. 2007), but it is less helpful for accounting for how and why change actually happens among national decision-makers or at smaller levels of scale (Pulver 2007; Shwom 2011). Relatedly, ecological modernization theory shares the same tendency as the field of political ecology to "blackbox" elites, or treat them as a monolithic entity, and to rarely analyze them as "the object of direct scrutiny" (Bull and Aguilar-Støen 2015, 21). Environmental sociology shares common ground with political ecology,

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which tends to privilege the experiences of the disadvantaged (Bull and Aguilar-Støen 2015, 6; Bryant 1992). To be clear, research that draws on the voices of people in marginalized groups is essential and should be a research priority. In order to help dismantle systems of oppression that create uneven environments for people around the world, we need more research on the causes and consequences of environmental injustices, including research on critical environmental justice studies (Pellow 2018).

However, as Bull (2015) puts it, if we "want to understand social change, we should study elites" (23). Recent research reveals how important it is to study members of the elite since they shape the environmental outcomes of others (Farrell 2020; Downey 2015) and, in the United States at least, have a disproportionate impact on the global buildup of greenhouse gas emissions (Nielsen et al. 2021, 16). Exploring elites with vast economic resources, however, must look different from studying elites with political and/or decision-making power. Since this book is about policymakers, I take inspiration from Jill Lindsey Harrison's (2019) examination of challenges within the United States Environmental Protection Agency and state-level environmental regulatory agencies that get in the way of these agencies' environmental reform efforts. Different from other research on environmental injustice, Harrison (2019) writes that to understand challenges in these offices, "we must go inside and talk to bureaucrats within them" (4). In theoretical terms, how can we prepare to do this?

Given the global reach of human activities, some researchers have called for theoretical refinements in how we think about and study socio-ecological systems. One helpful example comes from Collins et al. (2011), who propose a "press-pulse dynamics" framework for studying linked social and ecological systems. Insights from this framework are relevant to the narrative of Costa Rican climate mitigation policy development. Collins et al. (2011) explain that there are "sustained and chronic" press dynamics that alter ecosystems. Press dynamics—or things like sea level rise or land use conversions—happen slowly over time and are easy for observers to miss. The historical development of Costa Rica's class structure, described in the previous chapter, has made it possible for Costa Rican elites to consider the climate mitigation policies that are the focus of this book. As such, this history represents a kind of "press" dynamic of change (Rudel 2019; Collins et al. 2011). Another press dynamic, global temperature increases, raises the political stakes for taking action on climate (Rudel 2019, 9).

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By focusing only on how press dynamics motivate change, we miss moments of action, which would allow us to explain why planners adopt climate policy at certain moments and not others. To do that, we need to also account for what Collins et al. (2011) call "pulse" dynamics. Pulse dynamics are "relatively discrete and rapidly alter species abundances and ecosystem functioning" (Collins et al. 2011, 352). Social systems and decisions influence the "frequency, magnitude, or form" of these press and pulse dynamics (Collins et al. 2011, 353). What we can take from this theory is that we need to look more closely at the people involved in Costa Rica's climate mitigation policymaking process: Who are they, where are they, how do they know each other, and how do they work together (for better or worse)?

To understand how Costa Rica's policies have developed, we need to zoom in more to the national political context, while remaining aware of how domestic decisions are influenced by global processes (Hironaka 2014; Sikkink 2011). In this chapter, I argue that beyond Costa Rica's level of development, the members of a relatively unified and geographically proximate elite subculture have announced and felt the consequences of the nation's climate mitigation policies. Though not all of the members of this green elite work for the state, many of them move across and through various domains of social life, including but not limited to the state (see final column of table A.1). After the crises of the 1930s and 1940s, the state incorporated the rising middle class, giving way over time to a largely urban class of people, some of whom move in and out of various decision-making positions in the greater San José region (see figure 2.1).

To tease apart these dynamics, we must first clarify what we mean by the "elite." Second, we will explain the historical dynamics that gave rise to this unified elite subculture. Third, we will unpack the term "unified elite subculture" and discuss how the members of this subculture work. And finally, we will explore how some members of this elite subculture—specifically ministers and presidents—helped tip the scales of policymaking at various historical moments.

WHO IS IN THE ELITE?

From a Marxist perspective, the elite hold an advantaged position within a social structure. In contrast, from a Weberian perspective, the elite are identifiable "relative to the power and resources they possess" (Khan 2012, 362).

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The Weberian approach is more relevant to this story; either way, however, members of the elite are identified by their "control" over resources and their ability to shape decisions and outcomes (Khan 2012, 362; Bull and Aguilar-Støen 2015, 18). Burton, Gunther, and Higley (1992) write that the elite "are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially" (8).

Most major decisions about climate mitigation have come from the central government—presidents, ministers of the environment, and/or technical advisors. To understand how these decisions were made, we need to understand people in decision-making positions in Costa Rica who work in or with government on climate initiatives. I call these people the "green elite."

Most members of this "green elite" do not have vast economic power. Pablo, a scientist-academic with a history of civil society engagement, wanted me to know that he does not consider himself a member of the elite. To him, the term "elite" in the Central American context refers to large landholders. He added the following explanation, excerpted from my field notes:

> Look at Nicaragua, he added, "there, there are elites." He went on to describe how part of his wife's family comes from Nicaragua. They went there to visit them, and were told by the family, ok we'll pick you up from Managua and take you to our private island. So they go to the island, and they owned the entire island. And not just that, but then they have this super plush house on the island. That's an elite. He added, we have some very rich people here in Costa Rica, but those people typically don't have political power. They just have economic power.

When I asked Pablo, who had for a time worked closely with a former president as an advisor, to self-identify, he referred to himself (and others like him who move across sectors in Costa Rican society) as a member of the "intellectual elite." As he put it, these are very intellectual people but still people without much money. To distinguish this general *intellectual elite* in Costa Rica (the members of which can introduce or develop policies on numerous social problems, including but not limited to climate) from the people I focus on in this book (who have been active on the climate mitigation policy front), I use the term *green elite* whenever I mean this special group.

The people who have moved the needle on climate mitigation policy are members of the green elite. We are looking at the dynamics and influence of people with decision-making power (Bull and Aguilar-Støen 2015; Khan 2012), not economic power. Some of the people interviewed in this book are

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exclusively Spanish-speaking, often technical, legal, engineering, or policy experts. Some are what Steinberg (2001) calls bilateral activists, or multilingual Costa Ricans who are "at ease" in the domestic world of Costa Rica and in the global realm of climate policy, science, and funding (10).

In Costa Rica's comparatively more egalitarian class structure, members of the elite have historically been more inclined to invest in the public good (see chapter 2). The decades of the 1930s and 1940s reveal something heretofore unexplored: the coming together—economically, and interestingly, ideologically, of members of the elite and landholders. Over time, this created a relatively unified elite subculture in Costa Rica. I argue that to understand Costa Rica's climate mitigation commitments, we need to understand this elite subculture. To understand the influence of this elite subculture, we first need to look historically to try and understand how it formed. Then we will explore how this subculture makes a difference for contemporary climate mitigation policies.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIFIED ELITE SUBCULTURE

The late 1920s and early 1930s was a period of global economic crisis. When economic shocks hit Costa Rica in 1932, the class structure was still divided between the wealthy coffee processors and the numerous small and medium-sized coffee producers (Paige 1998, 128). At first, processors tried to pass along their economic pain to the small producers by, for example, setting low prices for coffee (Kutschbach 1995, 165). In response, in 1932, Costa Rican small producers organized and "launched an ultimately successful campaign to regulate the price of coffee purchased by processors" (Paige 1998, 129). They did this through "meetings, mass assemblies, and conferences," and by petitioning legislators and writing newspaper articles (Paige 1998, 129). Peaceful protests, rather than violent insurrections, characterized Costa Rica in the 1930s. Paige (1998) adds, "Politics revolved around the gentlemanly disagreements between large and small property owners, and the elite soon found that such conflicts could be easily managed by the gradual extension of the franchise to rural property owners and the establishment of democratic institutions" (87).

The result of these peaceful protests was the state's 1933 legislation to "[regulate] relations between growers and processors" (Paige 1998, 130). This legislation created ICAFE, the National Institute of Coffee. This historical

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moment is an example of how the political elite saw that the best way forward for their own economic well-being, for political stability, and for the economic well-being of the smallholders was to incorporate the non-elite growers.

In comparison, state leaders in other nearby, highly uneven coffee economies did not incorporate smallholders. The political situations that developed in the tumultuous decades of the 1930s/1940s reflected the class relations that had developed since the end of the colonial era. In El Salvador, where there were "deep economic and social divisions," a landless proletariat revolted (Paige 1998, 104). These uprisings were violently repressed by the elite, with the support of military forces. In Guatemala, the landed elite dominated the large landless serf class.

In Costa Rica, while part of the rationale and benefit for this "coming together" of elite and smallholder interests was economic, part of it was also ideological. The small and medium landholders shared an ideology with elite processors. Paige (1998) writes, "Neither the goals nor the tactics of the protest movement challenged the fundamental interests of the processors. And the ideology of the movement not only advocated class collaboration instead of class conflict but converged to a remarkable degree with the ideology of the large processors" (129–130). Both large processors and small/medium landowners believed their conflicts could be resolved peacefully and that "the small coffee producer was the bulwark of Costa Rican democracy and, therefore, of the nation" (Paige 1998, 130). In other words, by the 1930s, both classes of people (small landholders and elite processors) shared a belief in the sacrosanct idea of the "nation" of small landholding Costa Rica coffee producers and those producers' presumed role in causing and maintaining Costa Rica's democratic stability (see also Gudmundson 1986). While this myth was overblown, it is based in Costa Rica's national history of comparatively more egalitarian land ownership patterns, and this history had the important effect of helping to stabilize class relations at this time. It had the important consequence of providing a further rationale for the coming together, or the cohesiveness, of the elite and small landholders.

Costa Rica's brief 1948 revolution would seem to challenge this idea of a unified, upper/middle class coalition. Remarkably, however, how this revolt was settled does indicate a coming together of the middle and upper classes.

Political tensions grew during the 1940s, when President Calderón developed close alliances with the Communist Party to support his agenda. As

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discussed in the previous chapter, shortly after members of the Assembly voted to overthrow the results of the 1948 presidential election, José Figueres Ferrer, sisal farmer and critic of government corruption (Ameringer 1978; Boggs 2008), marched on San José with a six-hundred-man militia that he had organized at his farm called *La Lucha sin Fin* (The Endless Struggle). He did this on March 12, 1948, demanding that Ulate be president (Hoivik and Aas 1981). The fighting ended on April 19, 1948, after six weeks of fighting and one to two thousand casualties, mostly on the government's side (Hoivik and Aas 1981). On May 1, 1948, José Figueres signed a pact with president-elect Ulate. This pact left Figueres in charge of the country as the leader of a military junta for the next eighteen months. The pact also stipulated that Ulate would be president after the junta's rule. Though they occupied different class standings, Figueres (middle class) and Ulate (coffee elite, upper class) were united in their opposition to the threat of communism and the problems of electoral fraud.

Figueres immediately set about establishing Costa Rica's "second republic." In June 1948, he nationalized the banking system and initiated a 10 percent wealth tax (Wilson 1998, 43; Paige 1998, 146). Both measures significantly reduced the economic power of the coffee processing elite (Paige 1998). Both measures were part of Figueres's vision. "He rejected socialist state ownership but also laissez-faire capitalism, and sought a middle road through the establishment of state-sponsored autonomous entities to manage key sectors of the economy" (Paige 1998, 147). The Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE), an autonomous institution, was created at this time (Wilson 1998, 54). Between 1949 and 1990, ICE "maintained a near monopoly in electricity generation and distribution" (Wilde-Ramsing and Potter 2006, 78). In Article 1 of the 1949 law that created ICE, the utility is charged with "the rational development of the physical energy sources that the Nation possesses, *especially the hydraulic resources*"; this and other parts of the 1949 law "represent the formal establishment of the concepts of sustainable development and environmental protection upon which ICE operates" (Wilde-Ramsing and Potter 2006, 76). The army was abolished in December 1948, also during the military junta, and this decision was later codified in the new constitution (Wilson 1998). The constitution thus continued the pattern of providing major social reforms.

What were the effects of this six-week revolt on the elite subculture of Costa Rica? The political power of the coffee elite was reduced as a result of the civil

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war, but the coffee elite supported Figueres's decisions, nonetheless. Hoping to avoid further political crises, economic elites supported Figueres and his decisions, even though they endured economic losses because of them (Paige 1998, 150). During the second half of the twentieth century, the landholding elite (always small in Costa Rica) became further marginalized, though the wealth of coffee processors grew over time (Paige 1998, 151). Adding a comparative angle, Paige (1998) adds, "Alone in Central America the Costa Rican elite emerged from the Depression crisis with a commitment not only to the extension of the franchise to all (including, after 1948, women) but also to the notion of social citizenship and the welfare state. They also emerged with their political and economic power much diminished . . . Alone in the region Costa Rica incorporated the working and middle classes into an expanded welfare state, and the elite assimilated the ideas of the extended franchise and social welfare into its own ideology" (151–152). These dynamics helped Costa Rica avoid violent tumult in the 1980s.

We can draw out two major conclusions from the resolution of the Costa Rican civil war. First, the settlement of the war led to the incorporation, or a coming together, of the middle and wealthier classes in Costa Rica. This is different from what happened elsewhere in Central America. And second, the revolt, led by the junta, catalyzed a new social welfare model of development that would characterize Costa Rican development for the next several decades (chapter 2).

DYNAMICS OF A UNIFIED ELITE SUBCULTURE

If we want to understand how a more unified elite subculture works in Costa Rica and how it has mattered for climate mitigation policy development, we need to theorize a bit about relevant elite dynamics. First is the issue of size. Then we will consider elite cohesion, both social and geographical, and then elite exclusion of other groups.

In a country with a small population, the total number of people in the elite is also small (Burton, Gunther, and Higley 1992, 9). Group size is relevant to how people work together and the degree to which people work together efficiently to reach an outcome. Small groups are more efficient at arriving at collective action. In part, Olson (1965) writes, this is because there is a higher incentive for action among members of the smaller group, as compared to the larger group (55). This is why major tasks in a larger group (a committee)

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are often divided up among smaller groups (sub-committees). Olson (1965) adds, "In general, social pressure and social incentives operate only in groups of smaller size, in the groups so small that the members can have face-to-face contact with other another" (62). Costa Rica's small total population size and small number of people in the elite incline the green elite toward climate mitigation policies. Smallness creates pressure and an incentive to mobilize for collective action. This helps explain why in a comparative study, nations with smaller total populations were more likely than nations with larger populations to make carbon neutrality pledges (Flagg 2015).

On its own, group size is important but incomplete for explaining collective action—it must be understood in context. According to Ott (2000), what matters about elites in small countries is not just their small number but also their "small scale social structure," which means that the decision-making members of the elite are often in contact with one another. Here, it makes sense to quote Ott (2000) at length:

> In small states the number of elites is much smaller, and those elites are likely to know one another very well. This creates a level of association among elite groups that is historically based, and less likely to be tainted by disagreements over distribution or other issues. Because the elites interact on a deeper level, it is more likely that they will choose compromise over confrontation, and less likely that they will perceive the activities of their rival elites as threatening. Which is not to say that the elites will agree on every issue, but their overall pattern of interaction will be generally more cooperative. (195)

This account describes the actions and motivations of the people in Costa Rica's green elite well. As we will see in the coming chapters, some of the people who helped develop Costa Rica's recent climate mitigation policies had also worked together in prior decades to develop the national parks system (Evans 1999). The connections among people creating climate policy in Costa Rica are "historically based" (Ott 2000, 195). This kind of "historically based" connection is described in the epigraph to this chapter.

These historical elite connections occur within a broader societal context; in Costa Rica's case, it is one of a comparatively egalitarian class structure (chapter 2). In other, highly economically uneven contexts, a small elite manipulates conditions to enhance its own well-being (Van de Walle 2001).

Beyond having a small-scale social structure (Ott 2000), members of Costa Rica's green elite share similar life experiences. So, while it matters that the

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elite subculture is small, it also matters that it is *unified*.[1] Part of this unity comes from having similar life experiences. At least as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, it was common for members of the coffee processing elite to travel abroad (typically to the United States or United Kingdom) for higher education opportunities before returning to Costa Rica and becoming involved in politics (Gudmundson 1986, 70–71). This is now common among members of the green elite (see column 2 of table A.1 to see how many interviewees have at least master's degrees). Data are limited, but if we go back to 2015, data from the World Bank reveal that 2.34 percent of Costa Rica's population (aged twenty-five and older) held at least a master's degree or equivalent. This percentage surpasses (e.g., Chile, 1.16 percent) or nearly matches (Colombia, 3.16 percent) the same statistic in countries with much larger GDPs (World Bank 2023b). About a quarter of a percentage point (0.22 percent) of Costa Rica's population had earned a doctoral degree or equivalent in 2020. Data are missing for many other Latin American nations on these indicators. For comparison, in the United States in 2020, about 14 percent of the population had earned a master's degree, while about 2 percent of the population had earned a doctoral degree or equivalent.

Many of these people work as academic researchers before transitioning into an advisory role to the Costa Rican government. This reflects the "hybrid" model of state-led governance that has characterized Costa Rica in recent decades (Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020). With reduced state budgets, the state cannot oversee and manage all environmental policymaking and planning, and thus it relies on nonstate actors to assist with these tasks. Here it makes sense to hear from Félix, an academic at The Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center in Turrialba, Costa Rica (CATIE), who at the time of our interview, was serving as an advisor to the government. When I asked him to elaborate on what it meant to be an advisor, he said the following, excerpted from my field notes:

> He explained that in (1) "highly" developed countries (and listed Germany and Sweden as examples), you have "highly talented individuals joining government at all levels." Then, he said in (2) the United States, "a not fully developed country" some people with Ph.Ds. go into government but not always. Then he said, you have (3) developing countries, where we "don't have that at all." In other words, there isn't a large number of people with advanced degrees who go into government. Therefore, as he put it, ministries frequently rely on external advisors. He cited as an example the current minister of health—as he put it, the minister is

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FIGURE 3.1
A photograph of The Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE). *Source:* Author.

> smart (he knew him personally from a research experience). He elaborated that the minister has a ton of education, knowledge, and experience but the people basically immediately and then further below him have nowhere near that same level of education or experience. As he put it, it is the design of policy that is hard—that's where the ministers need those advisors. People working in ministries don't have expertise, so they need to be trained. Once they're trained though, they can carry it out.

In the context of the highly educated and relatively egalitarian class structure, there is a coming together of highly educated Costa Rican experts and government officials. Félix was perhaps exaggerating a bit (we "don't have that at all") when discussing rates of people with advanced degrees, considering that rates are far lower elsewhere in Latin America. But as Félix helpfully points out, there is a direct relationship between a nation's level of development and the level of educational expertise of people in a national ministry.

According to Domhoff (2022), people in "socially cohesive groups" are the most likely to agree on how to manage a problem (58). This applies to the

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unified elite subculture in Costa Rica, as the people in it share an economic class and a social class. As we will see in the coming chapters, most people who have designed Costa Rica's climate policies know one another, have worked together before, and have had similar life experiences. Cohesion can develop through "common membership in specific social institutions and friendships based on social interactions within those institutions" (Domhoff 2022, 58). It is worth remembering that people in a unified social class tend to "[exclude] people they do not see as similar to themselves" (Domhoff 2022, 16).

Highly educated professionals in Costa Rica working in the climate space regularly move across the same institutions. In their analysis of environmental policymaking in Costa Rica, Hrabanski et al. (2013) write, "In Costa Rica, the circulation of actors occurs between academic research centres, the State apparatus, and NGOs" (130). This very much defines the circulation of actors that I identified as well. Members of this comfortable, unified subculture have similar life experiences and then move across these institutional contexts over the course of their careers.

The members of Costa Rica's elite subculture are not just socially and economically similar—they also tend to live and work physically near each other. Most people, centers of decision-making, and universities are located in the country's *meseta central* (see relief on figure 2.1).

The density of institutional and social ties in and around San José has roots in the historical development of the coffee economy. Most Costa Rican coffee producers historically settled in the small area known as the Valle Central (Kutschbach 1995, 153). Edged by volcanoes to the north and mountains to the south, the *meseta central* is a highly fertile region. Again, in this way, Costa Rica is distinctive. In Colombia, coffee production occurred in three distinct areas, physically separating some coffee producers from others (Kutschbach 1995, 153). The smallholders who spread into the São Paulo region of Brazil settled further afield from the large coffee producers (Font 1990). The geography of coffee cultivation influenced Costa Rican politics. As the coffee economy developed in the central valley, coffee "had the effect of reinforcing the power of the central regions and its traditional upper class." Historically, the coffee elite became the political elite (Paige 1998; Peeler 1992).

Today, the central valley is the most densely populated part of Costa Rica. Table 3.1 includes data on the percentage of Costa Ricans living in urban areas. More than 80 percent of Costa Ricans live in urban areas; fully

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Table 3.1
Percentage of Costa Rican population living in urban areas by year

Year	Percentage of population living in urban areas (rounded to the nearest whole number)
1973	41
1983	44
1993	53
2003	63
2013	75
2021 (latest year for which data are available)	81

(*Source:* World Bank 2023b)

one-third of the urban population lives in the largest city (San José), representing a decline from the 1970s when half of Costa Rica's urban population lived there. This means that while the population has urbanized, this urban population is spread across several cities (World Bank 2023b).

Notice, in figure 2.1, how several major cities are located in the central valley. This area of high population and development in and around San José is referred to as the GMA, the Greater Metropolitan Area. It is difficult to illustrate this area precisely on a map since the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC) regularly updates the exact location of the GMA; however, recent estimates indicate that more than 60 percent of Costa Rica's population lives in the GMA, an area that consists of less than 4 percent of the national land area (Wikipedia 2023). As reported in the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy's 2030 Plan for Development of the central region[2] of the country, the GMA includes the cities of San José, Cartago, Heredia, and Alajuela (MIDEPLAN 2014). According to this report, Costa Rica's central region includes the greatest percentage of districts with the highest levels of social development (MIDEPLAN 2014, 18).

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the flagship public institutions of higher education are concentrated in the GMA. The University of Costa Rica (UCR), based in San José, is where many of the national figures who were pivotal in developing the national parks system earned their degrees and met each other (Evans 1999). The National University of Costa Rica is located in Heredia, while the Costa Rican Institute of Technology

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(TEC) is located in Cartago. The National Technical University can be found in Alajuela. All of these are within the GMA. There are some scientific institutions located outside of this dense knowledge network area. For example, CATIE, is located further toward the southeast, in the city of Turrialba, in Cartago province. Several members of Costa Rica's green elite have held research positions at this institution (see table A.1). However, CATIE is still within the central region of the country and is located relatively close to the outer boundaries of the GMA (MIDEPLAN 2014). CATIE is accessible from San José via a relatively short bus ride.

The high population and institutional density in Costa Rica's central valley has had three major effects. First, it puts elites and decision-making institutions physically near each other. As we will see, this facilitates collective action. Second, it means elites are not that physically far from non-elites, who may influence policymaking. Third, it has led to the continued exclusion of people outside the central valley.

As Paige (1998) found, the elite has historically conceived of the nation as "limited to the rural society of the central plateau" (225). This has had the important consequence of excluding people who live outside of this area, such as Black West Indian immigrant workers on Costa Rica's banana plantations along the Caribbean coast (Echeverri-Gent 1992). Costa Rican state officials have not managed to incorporate all of the economically and geographically diverse groups living within the national territory.

Mainstream, "white" (Gudmundson 1986; Paige 1998) Costa Rican society has, since the very early days, been based in the area in and around San José. Minor Keith came to Costa Rica in 1871 to build a railroad from the Atlantic coast to San José. He planted bananas along the railroad tracks. By 1899, he and another planter had joined forces to become the United Fruit Company. There was a challenge, however, to developing this area: labor. This area was described as "a lawless, pestilence-ridden, and almost uninhabited territory" (Echeverri-Gent 1992, 278). Hispanic Costa Ricans in the *meseta central* had no interest in working in these lands. Therefore, West Indian workers were brought to the territory to develop both the railroads and the banana fields (Echeverri-Gent 1992, 279). There, these workers were faced with significant discrimination. Echeverri-Gent (1992) adds, "Black workers were also rejected by society as a whole. In racially sensitive Costa Rica, black workers were not welcomed outside the Atlantic coastal banana plantations. Official circles in Costa Rica expressed concern

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at the threat to racial purity which blacks' tendency to drift to the highlands represented. A cabinet member openly stated that he would like to see the enactment of legislation forbidding blacks to settle beyond certain geographical boundaries" (282).

These Black West Indian immigrants/laborers, in the early 1900s, came to see that "they were on their own" and "came to think of themselves as an abandoned population" (Echeverri-Gent 1992, 288). It wasn't until the worker-led strikes against United Fruit Company in 1918–1919 that there was some mobilization and collaboration between the marginalized workers and mainstream society, when several San José–based unions connected with these workers.

PRESIDENTS AND MINISTERS

The structure of the unified elite subculture matters in this story because it is from this subculture that Costa Rica's climate mitigation policies have emerged. There are structural ways in which the people in this subculture interact: there are few of them, they are close to one another, they share similar life experiences, and they are geographically distant from dissimilar people. These factors facilitate collective action on climate mitigation policy. While this structural accounting of policy change matters, we would be missing part of the story if we did not look at some of the individual people who have helped tip the policy scales at particular historical moments. To do this, we need to look closer at the roles of ministers and presidents. These are people in domestically and internationally recognized positions who can help move policy.

Writing about the drivers of biodiversity policy in Costa Rica and Bolivia, Steinberg (2001) writes that while presidents and ministers "often have a decisive impact on environmental policy change," they have not been the "primary catalysts" for biodiversity policy because they are involved "for the short term," while in office (135). Although this was the case for biodiversity policy, I see something different for climate policy. I find that ministers and presidents—as well as how others see or understand the role of ministers and presidents—are special members of the green elite whose roles and actions are decisive in determining whether and which climate policies are pursued at specific moments. Also, I find the term green elite more appropriate for identifying the actors in this story, rather than

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Steinberg's (2001) "bilateral activists" because there is so much movement between highly educated people in science/activist positions and those in the Ministry for the Environment. Consider the example of current minister Franz Tattenbach Capra, an economist, prior president of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, prior director of FUNDECOR (The Foundation for the Protection of the Central Volcanic Mountain Chain), and a 2001 member of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) executive board (UNFCCC Secretariat 2001). How exactly might presidents and ministers matter?

The person who becomes president typically emerges from the unified, urban elite subculture. There are many examples, some of which we will see in the coming chapters. Just to take one example, Laura Chinchilla Miranda, Costa Rica's first female president (2010–2014), earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Costa Rica and a master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University in the United States, before returning to Costa Rica and holding the following positions before becoming president: vice minister of public security, minister of public security, member of the Legislative Assembly, and vice president (Encyclopedia Britannica 2023).

Sociology devotes attention to elites (Khan 2012) but less frequently to individual leaders such as presidents. Yet, we know from some recent social science research that presidents shape environmental change. Writing about deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, Rudel (2023) found that presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva both led reforms to slow deforestation, while deforestation rates rose again under the leadership of Jair Bolsonaro after 2019. A policymaker's views on climate change can have national consequences. Harrison and Sandstrom (2007) use the example of the Canadian prime minister (Jean Chrétien) who pushed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol amid resistance from industry (7–8). Researchers have recently called for more research to help unpack how presidents influence national climate policy outcomes. Edwards and Roberts (2015) write: "A better grasp of the relevance of presidential interest and commitment on climate change and its implications for domestic and international climate policymaking would be helpful" (184).

Weber (1978, 2013) argues that there are some people whose domination derives from their perceived charisma. If other people believe in the extraordinariness and trustworthiness of an individual, this person is said to have charisma, and others will follow him. Writing about Weber's work,

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Turner, Beeghley, and Powers (2012) add that charismatic individuals, "by the force of their personalities, communicate their inspiration to others and lead them in new directions" (213). This point suggests that it is necessary to understand whether, and if so how, well-known political leaders draw on their family or personal histories as a motivating force for Costa Rica's climate policies. This line of thinking suggests that Costa Rica's climate mitigation policies simply cannot be understood without centering the members of these political families.

Research specifically on Costa Rican politics underscores the importance of understanding presidents. Wilson's (1998) book explores how the social democratic party (the PLN) expanded the social welfare model in the decades after the civil war, but also, and surprisingly, rolled back the social welfare model during the debt crisis of the 1980s. Arguing that only part of this rollback can be attributed to the role of IFIs, Wilson explains that key individuals have turned toward neoliberal polices, not the PLN party itself.

Given their interest in generalizing, social scientists tend to give greater attention to the presidency rather than individual presidents (Bowles 1999); however, moving into the field of biography can be helpful for understanding social change from a social science perspective. For example, Ivanova (2021) has interesting ideas about leadership and how leaders shape institutional environmental outcomes. In her analysis of the UNEP, Ivanova (2021) identifies leadership as an important part of explaining the institution's successes and challenges and writes that "to make sense of UNEP's first five decades, it is essential to bring individuals back into the study of the institution and explain their influence" (142). For example, she finds that leaders' personal contacts, management styles, and travel schedules shaped the institution's influence over time (Ivanova 2021). Helpfully, Ivanova (2021) adds, "Leadership qualities are intrinsic to the individual leader but are also shaped by the historical context in which they act" (142). The following analysis aims to understand presidents and ministers in this same way.

As we think about the roles of ministers and presidents, who might be able to tip the scales of policy development at particular historical moments, it is worth returning to our earlier discussion about slowly developing "press" dynamics versus more rapid "pulse" dynamics of socio-ecological change (Collins et al. 2011). Paying greater attention to the people on the ground who shaped more rapid processes—for example, decision-making, events,

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and attendance at global fora—will help us fill in the more rapid "pulse" dynamics that foster policy changes at specific moments. As an example of this, Rudel (2019) argues that experiences from early on in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's life influenced the agro-ecological changes related to soil that became part of the New Deal. Focusing on these pulse moments and the factors related to specific ministers and presidents will help the next couple of chapters outline a more "eventful sociology" (Rudel 2012). The people that decision-makers talk to influence what kinds of policies are made (Pulver 2007; Pulver et al. 2010). Information gained from on-the-ground interviews with members of Costa Rica's green elite, presented through the next four chapters, will show us how this kind of networked, elite subculture works and how its members mattered for shaping Costa Rica's ambitious climate mitigation policies.

In the age of globalization, elites not only influence, and are influenced by, national outcomes (Burton, Gunther, and Higley 1992) but also people, institutions, and processes outside national boundaries. Bohlken (2009) writes about a "transnational political elite." According to Bohlken (2009), members of the transnational political elite are heads of supranational political institutions, transnational organizations, or multinational corporations or supranational organizations. While only some of the people involved in Costa Rica's climate mitigation policy would fit this relatively narrow definition of the transnational elite, many members of Costa Rica's green elite have had transnational influence and exposure. Through his transnational influence, Óscar Arias changed several decades of Costa Rican life, including its climate mitigation policies. It is to Arias's first presidency (1986–1990) that we now turn.

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4 FOUNDATIONS (1986–1990): INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL RESTRUCTURING

> 1986 "is the beginning of the work on decarbonization."
> —Field notes from interview with Samuel, former minister of the environment

> Álvaro Umaña's position as the minister of the MINEREM meant that for "the first time, we had a person in government that knew the theme" about deforestation.
> —Field notes from interview with William, former minister of the environment

As these two excerpts from field notes reveal, the institutional structure for managing environmental issues in Costa Rica has roots in 1986. At this time, Costa Rican leaders gave more attention to sustainable development, a concept that "started to flourish in international conservationist thought by the mid-1980s" (Evans 1999, 154). This point supports Hironaka's (2014) claim that the "entrance of an environmental issue on the international agenda is likely to also put it on national agendas" (61). As a reminder, this was several years before the 1992 Earth Summit, an event that catalyzed further global awareness and action on climate change. The late 1980s was not a time when institutional decision-making with consequences for climate mitigation would have been expected from a small country in the global south, one that was still reeling from economic crises from earlier in the decade. In this context, why were environmental issues taken up to the degree that they were in Costa Rica?

Although climate initiatives, per se, were not advanced by the Costa Rican green elite during the late 1980s, the institutional foundations were set at

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this time that would enable later decisive actions around climate. The reasons for this are factors already discussed in this book: the class structure and green elite dynamics. In the late 1980s, Costa Rican planners established the institutional foundations that would enable later climate policies because of Costa Rica's stability at this time, which is rooted in the country's historical class dynamics. The elite incorporated the middle, landholding class in the 1930s and 1940s, and this helped Costa Rica—unlike some of its neighbors—avoid a violent, class-based revolution in the 1980s (Paige 1998). However, the people on the ground and their histories matter too. In particular, Óscar Arias—who was inspired by the history of José Figueres Ferrer—influenced this era by helping to create the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy, and Mines (MINEREM). In addition, Óscar Arias received significant transnational exposure after receiving a Nobel Peace Prize in 1987. This moment influenced which policies the Costa Rican green elite would pursue in future years, as we will see in the coming chapters.

BACKGROUND OF ÓSCAR ARIAS SÁNCHEZ

Óscar Arias Sánchez was the National Liberation Party (PLN) candidate in the 1986 election. Through both his mother's and his father's families, Arias descends from significant coffee wealth. As Paige (1998) writes, Arias is the "grandson on his mother's side of legendary Costa Rican coffee grower and processor Julio Sánchez Lépiz, and on his father's side of the prominent coffee growing Arias family through which Óscar can trace his ancestry to the conquistador of Costa Rica, Juan Vázquez de Coronado" (3). His maternal grandfather, Julio Sánchez Lépiz, began as a poor coffee merchant, but by the early twentieth century, he had amassed significant wealth though the ownership of several coffee estates and coffee processing plants (Paige 1998, 17). Arias is from Heredia (see figure 2.1). Like many other members of Costa Rica's traditional coffee processing elite—and green elite—Arias has several advanced degrees. He studied briefly at Boston University before returning to Costa Rica to earn his undergraduate degree from the University of Costa Rica. He then studied at the London School of Economics before earning his PhD in political science from the University of Essex.

When he was interviewed by several scholars at Duke University in the United States in 1991, Arias had the following to say about his time at

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Boston University, his studies in medicine at that time, and his seemingly rapid transition into a life of politics:

> And it was at the time of the Nixon Kennedy campaign. This was 1959. So I had a chance, as most of the American people did, to watch on television the debates between Nixon and Kennedy. And being a Latin American, Latin American in Boston, so much interested in a better relationship between the Latin American nations and the United States, and not very happy with the Eisenhower years, I decided to write an essay to university students in different university papers. So I wrote on the future of Latin America and the United States, a couple of articles. And when Kennedy won the election, I also wrote a letter to him. He later invited a few Latin American students to come to see him to Hyannis Port. *I was one of them. I admire Kennedy very much, and I was very much inspired by him. So I decided that I was wasting my time studying medicine*. I went back and studied law and economics in the University of Costa Rica, and later on I was able to get this scholarship to go to England. I had already spent a year and a half here in America. This is why I preferred to go to Europe this time. (Arias 1991, emphasis added)

One of my respondents, Félix, a PhD-holding academic described Arias as a politician who was "educated, groomed, and treated for glory." Both Félix and Pablo, another academic with a PhD, described Arias as an Oxford-educated politician, despite the fact that Arias did not receive a degree from Oxford University. The fact, however, that two highly educated and politically involved people (one of whom worked closely with Arias) referred to Arias as Oxford-educated gives us a sense of how much prestige people ascribe to Arias. It perhaps also reflects how much prestige Arias ascribes to himself.

In his early years, before the 1986 election, Arias was influenced by the legendary José "Don Pepe" Figueres Ferrer. According to another respondent, Emilia, a civil society advocate who had also worked with government and who could speak to the relationship between the two men, Arias studied under Figueres and Figueres "mentored" him. Again, Arias's own words reveal how much "Don Pepe" shaped his life. In responding to the interview question "What motivated you to run for Congress and to become so involved in *Liberación Nacional*?" later in that same 1991 interview in the United States, Arias (1991) said the following:

> I come from a very conservative family. My family, all the members of my family are not members of *Liberación Nacional*, but of a much more conservative party. So in a way, I became some sort of black sheep in the family, because when I first met José Figueres, the founder of the party, I decided that I wanted someday to work near him. This was in the early 60s. I was just a student at The University of Costa

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> Rica. So I started reading a lot about the classics, english [sic] classics and I decided, when I was about 23, 24 years old, that I wanted to become a member of *Liberación Nacional*, which as you know is a social democratic party.
>
> Then I graduated and went to London, and when I got back in late 1969 Costa Rica was in the middle of a political campaign. José Figueres was the candidate for our party and I decided to participate in that campaign. This is why he later asked me to join his government. He won the election. This was his second presidency, and well I had this opportunity to serve in the cabinet as Minister of Economic Planning for four years. And then, because I wanted to make a political career I knew that it was important for me to go to Congress. So I decided to run for Congress. I won a seat, and it was a wonderful experience.

Arias was the minister of planning during most of Daniel Oduber's (1974–1978) presidency and during these four years, park acreage increased significantly as Oduber (a rancher, not someone initially deemed "pro" parks) became "convinced of the potential economic benefits of nature tourism" (Steinberg 2001, 73). Oduber created a commission on environmental issues and put Arias in charge of it (Steinberg 2001, 77). This illustrates a point made in the prior chapter—highly educated, urban professionals (some of whom go on to become presidents or ministers) have extensive connections with one another due to previous experiences working with each other and because they move across the same kinds of institutions. This point also illustrates Ott's (2000) ideas about the "small scale social structure" of nations with small populations.

Leading up to the 1986 election, Costa Rica was at the height of its neoliberal turn. As discussed earlier, Arias's predecessor, Luis Monge, also of the liberal PLN party, had advanced a series of neoliberal economic reforms in an attempt to restabilize the Costa Rican economy. As Wilson (1998) writes, however, "Candidate Arias sidestepped the issue of the application of neoliberal economic policies by the incumbent PLN administration of President Monge and attempted to present himself as an old-style *Liberacionista* by emphasizing his commitment to an ambitious state-funded housing program" (141–142) In other words, Arias framed himself as a leader in the style of José "Don Pepe" Figueres, yet once in office, he often sided with neoliberal economists over members of his own cabinet.

According to Steinberg (2001), the Arias campaign did not give much consideration to the natural environment. Instead, Arias won the 1986 presidential election by running on a platform to ensure regional peace at a tense time (Steinberg 2001, 76–77). Arias managed to secure victory only narrowly, in

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large part due to the success of the PLN to associate Arias's challenger, Calderón, with "rearmament and interventionism" (Dunkerley 1988, 644; see also Paige 1998, 42–43). As the candidate for peace, Arias won the presidential contest.

Arias achieved international status in 1987, when he was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. Understanding the circumstances that led to Arias receiving the prize as well as the prize's social and economic consequences is relevant to Costa Rica's climate policy narrative. Building on his reputation in the 1986 presidential election as the candidate for peace, Arias created a document called "A Time for Peace," a plan for establishing regional peace in Central America. As Dunkerley (1988) writes, among other things, "this document proposed an amnesty for rebel groups followed by ceasefire and negotiations, the suspension of military aid for insurgent groups from outside the region, and the ending of refuge for rebels fighting in neighbouring states, all of which steps were to be monitored by an international commission" (645). The Reagan administration had drafted an earlier version of a peace plan that was ultimately scrapped by the Central American heads of state (Dunkerley 1988, 647). Arias's plan, unlike earlier approaches, invited all Central American governments, including the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. This, as well as Arias's refusal to allow United States–operated *contra* (anti-Sandinista) bases within Costa Rican territory, put Arias "on a collision course with the Reagan administration" (Paige 1998, 42). During a meeting in Guatemala City in August 1987, all Central American heads of state agreed to the plan. Later that year, Arias received a Nobel Peace Prize for these efforts. Arias's plan, which emphasized Central American nations' autonomy, shared something with José Figueres Ferrer's vision about liberating Central American nations from dictators. Both aimed to enhance the region's stability and autonomy.

There were numerous and far-reaching effects of Arias's Nobel Peace Prize. On a cultural level, Paige (1998) writes that Arias's victory was an "affirmation of the values of the Costa Rican national ideology of democratic exceptionalism" (219). His victory served to bolster the myth of Costa Rica's history as a "rural democracy" (Paige 1998, 222), ideas discussed in chapter 2. The prize also meant that Costa Rica's position in the global polity changed. For example, Félix, one of the academic respondents cited earlier, had the following to say about the effects of Arias's award: "It doesn't get better than that in terms of reaching global significance." He added that because of the Nobel Peace Prize, Arias became a "force you turn to" when you want to do

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something in Costa Rica because he is so well known and respected. As we will see, government leaders and advisors did exactly that regarding climate issues during Arias's second presidency. Finally, Félix added that Arias "joins a list of Latin American heroes" when he received the prize.

In addition to the cultural and reputational changes following the Nobel, the economic benefits of Arias's Prize were substantial, particularly regarding growth in a particular style of tourism—ecotourism. While many ecotourism enterprises opened in the 1970s, it was not until the late 1980s, after he received the prize, that the ecotourism industry boomed (Evans 1999, 227; Honey, Vargas, and Durham 2010, 16). Between 1986 and 1995, the number of foreign tourists visiting Costa Rica more than tripled (Evans 1999, 227). By the early 1990s, tourism became the largest contributor to the Costa Rican gross domestic product (Daniels 2010; LePree 2008–2009), surpassing agricultural exports such as coffee and bananas. All this positive international exposure created synergies, which also followed the carbon neutrality pledge.

Among people interviewed for this project, there was not universal agreement that Arias deserved the Nobel Peace Prize. Emilia, who mentioned that Don Pepe "mentored" Arias, described the Nobel laureate as very polarizing. Speaking specifically about the Nobel Prize, she added that his international image, as a revered statesman, does not align with his domestic image as a polarizing figure. As she put it, Costa Ricans ask, what did you do to deserve that? Meaning some people think, did Arias really deserve the Nobel? Did he really do enough to merit one? But, she added, the country is incredibly polarized about it. She added that those who love him say he put Costa Rica on the map. He's eloquent. But people who feel the opposite way say that it was an unfair granting and that other people deserved it more.

Juan, an academic, also mentioned some of the controversy surrounding Arias's receipt of the Nobel. When I asked him how Arias and Costa Rica changed after Arias was awarded the Nobel, on the one hand, Juan said that the prize was another "key" moment in the projection of the idea that "We [Costa Ricans] are the best." He told a story about a time when he was on a train in Japan and someone asked where he was from. When he said he was from Costa Rica, the person immediately recognized Costa Rica as the country with a Nobel Prize winner. But on the other hand, and like Emilia, Juan explained that Arias is not well liked throughout Central America. He added that the president of Guatemala thought that the prize should have gone to the presidents of all five countries that participated in the peace accords or to

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himself (President Cerezo) and Arias—but not to Arias alone. As Juan added, the peace plan, the actual document about achieving peace, was written by Arias though it was both Arias and President Cerezo who had the first talks about the process. In other words, Juan articulated the idea that receiving the Nobel Peace Prize improved the way people from the global community saw Arias and Costa Rica. But closer to home, the Nobel transformed Arias into a more divisive statesman.

With the funds that he received from the Nobel Peace Prize, Arias created the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress. The foundation is based in downtown San José, and since 1988, has, according to its website, worked to "advance democracy, equality between genders, and disarmament and demilitarization" (Fundación Arias 2022). Arias's reputation, before 2019, as will be discussed in chapter 6, was solidified as an international symbol of peace and democracy. He was profiled in a 2017 documentary titled "Óscar Arias: Without a Shot Fired" (IMDB n.d.) and has received numerous honorary degrees from prestigious world universities.

ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTIONALIZATION DURING ARIAS'S FIRST PRESIDENCY (1986–1990)

Although Arias did not campaign for president on a pro-environmental stance, once he became president, he surprised many by lending his support to several environmental initiatives (Steinberg 2001, 76–77). A new ministry, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy, and Mines (MINEREM) was "conceived" during Arias's term (Evans 1999, 162); therefore, some have credited Arias with helping to institutionalize environmental concern in Costa Rica (Steinberg 2001). What since 1982 had been called the Ministry of Industry, Energy, and Mines (MIEM), became in 1988 the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy, and Mines (MINEREM). The area of "industry" was moved to the Ministry of Economy and Commerce (MINAE n.d.).

Reflecting on this time, my respondent Tobias, a former minister of the environment, said that it was "absolutely by design" to have energy and the environment under the same ministry given Costa Rica's high reliance on hydropower. Samuel, another former minister of the environment, echoed this sentiment, explaining that it was a "decision" to put these different areas together in the MINEREM. Tobias added that a consequence of this institutional structure is that "when you design a new hydro project,

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you'd plan for the watershed as well." While this point might be a little overly optimistic, and while this reorganizing did not completely solve conflicts with hydropower in Costa Rica (Fletcher and Frece 2020), it was foresighted to merge natural resources, such as the parks, energy, and mines under the same ministry. As interviewee William's opening quote to this chapter makes clear, interviewees credited Álvaro Umaña, the first minister of the MINEREM for helping to make this consolidation possible and overall helping to move environmental issues in a progressive direction. Over time, this institutional restructuring may have led to conflicts being resolved faster and more easily, as people potentially at odds with each other were all under the same roof. Finally, Tobias recalled that this was a difficult time because it meant a lot of reorganizing. This change to the ministry meant taking national parks and forestry out of the Ministry of Agriculture and putting them under a new ministry.

When MINEREM was established, José María Figueres served as minister of agriculture (CGDC 2021). As we will see in the next chapter, his time in this role proved consequential for the policies he tried to advance during his presidency (1994–1998). Up to this point, the growing national parks system had been overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, an arrangement that seemed to hamstring the ministry's efforts to protect parks. My interviewee Samuel, another former minister of the environment with a long historical perspective, explained that staff at the Ministry of Agriculture were not "sympathetic" to the theme of conservation. For them, conservation "was a threat" for people in rural areas and for agriculture. As a consequence, he added, forests were turned into plantations and cattle pastures. By putting people who oversee issues related to renewable and nonrenewable energy together under the same ministry, this "eliminated tensions" that often arise in other countries because these interests are pitted against each other or belong to different ministries. Creating MINEREM in 1986 created the "institutional conditions" that would eventually make it possible to assemble the decarbonization plan.

My respondent William, another former minister of the environment, called Arias's first presidency a time of "very significant institutional restructuring." He recalled working at this time to help "integrate" all of these new areas—forestry, national parks, wild areas, and the National Institute of Meteorology—into the MINEREM. He added that Álvaro Umaña's position as minister meant that for "the first time, we had a person in government

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that knew the theme" of deforestation. He recalled how before the parks were moved to the MINEREM, he would often meet with the minister of agriculture on the weekend and show him what was happening with deforestation. These visits would convince the minister that these issues had to be addressed, and William recalled the minister being motivated to do so. But, William added, then he would go to follow up with the minister on Monday to pursue next steps, and the minister would be totally consumed with issues related to agriculture and didn't have time to return to the issues of deforestation. So, the combination of institutional restructuring and the leadership of Álvaro Umaña improved environmental planning at this time.

Arias selected Álvaro Umaña Quesada, a graduate of Stanford University in the United States who holds a PhD in environmental engineering, to lead the ministry. Arias is credited as supporting what Umaña wanted to pursue, even though he could offer no financial support to his efforts (Steinberg 2001, 78). While policies on climate change, per se, weren't developed at this time, some people recalled that this was an influential time. A respondent from academia, Luis, recalled that a lot was happening during these years. Samuel, a former minister of the environment, described this era as one that established the "institutional conditions" for Costa Rica's later climate policies. He recalled that with Umaña leading the MINEREM, several laws were passed and the country was creating a "vision" of conservation. Another former minister of the environment, Tobias, said that Arias "started with a sustainability focus" and recalled that in 1986, the work on the National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development began (ECODES in Spanish). He recalled that putting together this plan was an "open process" and that Costa Rica received support from the World Wildlife Fund and the Nature Conservancy. Tobias reminded me that all of this work took place "before Rio," as if to signal Costa Rica's significant domestic agenda on sustainable development before the concept was more mainstream by 1992. The government also helped organize several debt-for-nature swaps at this time. Evans (1999) writes that "by 1991 over $40 million of external debt had been erased by purchases from international organizations" (158). Under the leadership of Álvaro Umaña, Costa Rica emerged as an international "leader" in these swaps (Steinberg 2001, 81).

Costa Rica's ability to attract external support for its debt-for-nature swaps reveals the consequences of its elevated social development and middle-income country status; other countries were willing to partner with Costa

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Rica to carry out these swaps. Deacon and Murphy's (1997) analysis reveals that there were certain factors that made some developing countries more likely than others to engage in debt-for-nature swaps in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Tropical countries with lots of endangered species, countries with high debt burdens, and countries with democratic governments were more likely to do swaps than countries without these features. Where these factors exist, the stakes are high and thus the swap is seen as a necessary intervention. Democratic stability matters because swaps require a time investment from the developed country government or INGO. Deacon and Murphy (1997) write, "Contracts are postulated to be least secure when contract enforcement and the judicial process in the host country are controlled by individuals or cliques rather than laws, constitutions, and anonymous legal institutions, and when the host government is vulnerable to overthrow" (15). In other words, Costa Rica's good governance made it a safe bet for foreign governments and INGOs (see also Lewis 2003).

One interviewee disagreed somewhat about the importance of environmental themes during Arias's first presidency. Juan, an academic, recalled that the environment was not a priority at this time and that instead peace was the theme. He said that economic issues, namely economic restructuring, dealing with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and trying to initiate business with European companies, were greater priorities than the environment at this time. However, Juan added that this was still an important time since ideas were building around environmental issues, that Costa Rica didn't abandon its green discourse, and that local environmental groups were still working to advance their initiatives. He specifically mentioned the importance of the year 1990, on the cusp between the Arias and Calderón years, when four people formed the Center of Political Economic Investigations (CINPE in Spanish), at the National University of Costa Rica. As Juan explained, the founding figures of CINPE began to introduce the idea of environmental issues and environmental studies at the graduate level in Costa Rica, and they argued for environmental protection but also for the need to talk about public policies related to environmental protection. And as he put it, once these people founded CINPE, there was a rise in public policies having to do with the environment. He specifically mentioned Costa Rica's decision to sign Agenda 21 at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as a consequence of this group's actions. As he observed, at this time (1990,

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1992), there were concepts and the idea that Costa Rica had to do more than just discourse—it had to move in the direction of environmental policy. Other sources also show that during the 1990s, cooperation was building across sectors in Costa Rica (Glasbergen and Miranda 2003). We will see that an advisor to the government explained that during the subsequent years, Costa Rica was doing pioneering work on climate, as it tried to move climate planning from the realm of theory to policies. This provides some evidence of a rising green elite at this time: university officials who began to extol the value of moving environmental ideas from theory to practice. We will see much evidence of this work in the coming chapters.

SUMMARY

The establishment of Costa Rica's "second republic," including the creation of ICE and the elimination of the army, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, shaped Costa Rica's historical development and the future of Costa Rica's electricity grid. However, it is this later period—the late 1980s—that established some of the contemporary roots of Costa Rica's recent climate mitigation policies. Why? The institutional foundations of later climate policies were established during this time. How? Costa Rica's stability at this time, based on the evolving class dynamics of the 1930s and 1940s that incorporated the rising middle class after the civil war, helped Costa Rica avoid the revolutionary tumult of the decade that people elsewhere in the isthmus encountered. Costa Rican planners turned their attention inward, undertaking institutional restructuring at the beginning of the Arias years. And Costa Rica's democratic stability at this time generated positive external consequences, as it made Costa Rica a safe bet for INGOs and foreign governments interested in establishing debt-for-nature swaps.

But we can't talk about this era without talking about early members of the green elite. President Arias, though not having an especially "green" reputation, was inspired by the earlier work of José Figueres Ferrer, and he was catapulted onto the global stage after standing up to American interests and proposing a Central American peace plan led by people in Central America. Arias's 1987 receipt of a Nobel Peace Prize led to a transformation in Costa Rica's economy, away from agricultural exports and toward green services (ecotourism). This event changed the Costa Rican economy and changed

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how people in geographically distant places would see Costa Rica for decades to come. Arias selected a member of the consolidated green elite subculture, Álvaro Umaña, to lead the MINEREM. Umaña, trained in the United States, shaped the environmental policies of this time and remained an influential member of the green elite in the decades to come. While this era established some of the foundations for the climate mitigation policies to come, the next period—the mid-1990s—involves significant expansion of policymaking with a specific focus on climate mitigation.

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5 EXPANSION (1994–1998): THE SHIFT TOWARD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE

> In the 1960s and 1970s, Costa Rica received substantial financial support from abroad, especially the United States, but by the 1990s, this support had slowed significantly. The money dried up by this time since, to the United States, Costa Rica was the "golden child" and qualified as a "middle income country." Therefore, leaders in Costa Rica saw climate change and sustainable development and said, this is the way to get international funds—by being "a thought leader" in these two emerging areas.
>
> —Field notes from interview with Robert, former advisor to the MINAE

> Costa Rica is offering itself to the world as a "laboratory" for this new development paradigm—a laboratory in which we can, with help from the international community, design frameworks and mechanisms for a sustainable future.
>
> —José María Figueres Olsen (1996, 190)

Costa Rican law stipulates that presidents cannot hold subsequent terms in office, a rule that, among other things, weakens the power of the president and allows members of the same political party to position themselves very differently from one another (Wilson 1998). Following the 1986–1990 term of Óscar Arias Sánchez, Rafael Ángel Calderón Fournier of the center-right Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) party (and son of the pre–civil war president Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia) won the 1990 presidential election. Green elite dynamics mattered less during the Calderón years, in part because of the difference between Calderón and Arias. As Steinberg (2001) says, Calderón "could not match Óscar Arias in profile or popularity" (81).

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People I interviewed for this book did not mention Calderón specifically as an agent of change in Costa Rica's climate mitigation policies, in spite of the fact that he called for the creation of a "new ecological order" (Evans 1999) and that he was president when nations signed the UNFCCC, an event that, from a world society perspective, was important in turning the global community's attention to climate (Hironaka 2014). When asked to recall the timeline of Costa Rica's climate mitigation policies, interviewees often jumped directly from speaking about events from Arias's first presidency to occurrences from the mid-1990s, during José María Figueres's time in office.

A few interviewees mentioned the Calderón years as an important period because it was a time when ideas were building across Costa Rica about the need to do more for sustainability. However, no one interviewed described 1990–1994 as a period when policy moved, with consequences for climate mitigation. This period was a time when nearly all heads of state were discussing sustainable development, so Calderón himself appears not to have mattered. More common was the tendency for interviewees to describe the following presidential term—that of José María Figueres—as a time when climate policies were developed and taken seriously.

There was an active domestic environmental movement at this time, but Costa Rica did not translate this homegrown energy into internationally recognized leadership at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, a position that Costa Rican planners would more comfortably occupy in later years. As Steinberg (2001) writes about 1992, "On the international stage tiny Costa Rica was only a marginal player at the Earth Summit" (87). Costa Rica signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at Rio because "it was already doing most of what the convention required" (Steinberg 2001, 87). As Edwards and Roberts (2015, 46) add, of the Latin American nations, really only Brazil had an active voice and presence at Rio.

Although President Calderón attended the 1992 Earth Summit, it was not until several years later that the Costa Rican green elite started to act on sustainable development and climate-relevant policies. The dynamics discussed earlier in this book shaped the policies of this time. Costa Rica's elevated level of social development by the mid-1990s made it so that it was not receiving as much development assistance as in years prior. That, combined with the growing importance of climate change and sustainable development, helped raise the profile of sustainable development and climate initiatives

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in Costa Rica. Within this context, elites moved on domestic, regional, and several global opportunities for climate mitigation.

The unified green elite was highly active on climate-relevant policies at this time. President Figueres and his minister of the environment René Castro assembled a small, highly (and similarly) educated, nimble group composed of Costa Ricans and some foreigners who worked well and quickly together on several initiatives. In addition, Figueres himself mattered during this era. His family background, as well as his prior experience as the minister of agriculture, made him attuned to the issues facing Costa Rican farmers in rural landscapes and influenced how he approached sustainability policies.

BACKGROUND OF JOSÉ MARÍA FIGUERES OLSEN

Following his divorce from Henrietta Boggs, José "Don Pepe" Figueres Ferrer married Karen Olsen Beck. The pair had four children including José María and Christiana Figueres. José María was born in December 1954 (José María Figueres 2022) and grew up on the rural family farm called *La Lucha sin Fin* where his father had raised a militia to overthrow the government's armed forces in 1948. José María grew up during a period of rapid change in Costa Rica's conservation history. In the 1970s, both of his parents worked to protect Costa Rican forests (Evans 1999). Although José María's father had a more international reputation, his mother played a critical role in domestic conservation efforts. Leading Costa Rican conservationists called Karen Olsen Beck de Figueres their "fairy godmother" because of how she assisted national conservation efforts (Evans 1999). José María has described how both of his parents influenced him (Vidal 2012).

José María attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, somewhat surprisingly given that his father is the only head of state to have abolished an army while serving as head of state (Vidal 2012). As Paulo, a former minister of the environment, explained, "Don Pepe" encouraged José María to attend West Point so that his son could understand the experience of living in a country with an army. José María described it differently, stating that his father "had a fit when I went to West Point. He never went there. Perhaps it was my challenge to him" (Vidal 2012). At West Point, José María earned a degree in engineering. Following a similar pattern as many members of the unified, urban elite subculture (chapter 3), after earning his

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degree, he returned to Costa Rica and in 1988, during Óscar Arias's presidency, served as the minister of agriculture. Notably, his time in this ministry coincided with the founding of the MINEREM, and the movement of the national parks administration out of the Ministry of Agriculture and into the MINEREM. In the early 1990s, he attended Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government where he earned a master's degree in public administration. Since leaving office in 1998, José María has remained a prominent global figure for sustainable development. For a time, he served as the executive of the World Economic Forum but resigned from the post in 2004 after admitting to accepting a substantial payment from the French telecommunication company Alcatel in exchange a work contract (Kimer 2007). Some have forgiven him, while others have not. In an April 2022 runoff to become the next Costa Rican president, Figueres lost to former World Bank economist Rodrigo Chaves.

Ahead of the 1994 election, former president Óscar Arias supported his wife's candidacy, not José María's (Wilson 1998, 144). Even in the final moments of the campaign, Arias refused to name Figueres and advised voters to only support the PLN, reflecting a divide within the party (Wilson 1998, 144), something mentioned by people I interviewed. For example, as Pablo, an academic scientist who had served in an advisory capacity to government, put it, the divide in the PLN might be understood by asking the question "Who is the leader of the PLN? Is it the Nobel Prize winner or the son of the creator of the second republic?"

Even without Arias's support, José María Figueres was elected president on February 6, 1994 (LADB 1994), about four years after the passing of his father. At the age of thirty-nine, José María was the youngest person in contemporary Costa Rican history to assume the presidency. As described in the previous chapter, some of the historical roots of Costa Rican sustainable development initiatives began in the immediate aftermath of the civil war with, for example, the creation of the Costa Rican Institute of Electricity (ICE). José María gave credit to this earlier era, and the decision about ICE specifically, in his first moments as president (Wilde-Ramsing and Potter 2006). Figueres went on to make sustainable development the organizing principle of his presidency. Samuel, a former minister of the environment, called Figueres the "first president to talk about sustainable development." Figueres's words and his physical appearance reminded others of his family ties. Barbara, an environmental advisor to the government in the 1990s,

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commented on José María's "striking resemblance" to his father, adding, "It's a mantle he could not take off without taking off his skin."

THE FIGUERES "TEAM"

According to several people, Figueres assembled a group of people who were highly specialized and knowledgeable about sustainability and climate issues. Figueres said this as well, as quoted in Vidal (2012): "I brought in economists like Jeffrey Sachs. I was strongly influenced by people like Maurice Strong [who headed the Rio earth summit] and his adviser on business, the Swiss industrialist Stefan Shmidheiny who set up the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)." It was significant for a small country in the global south to host major global figures in the field of sustainability. Figueres chose René Castro (an engineer) as his minister of the environment. Two people interviewed for this book, Paulo, a former minister of the environment, and Robert, a former advisor to the Figueres government, who both had deep knowledge about this time period, kept using the word "team" to refer to the group of people that worked on climate issues during the Figueres years. Something that helped this team work together was that several of its members had a similar educational background. According to one person, there were about ten people in the Figueres administration, including Figueres and Castro, who had earned advanced degrees from Harvard University in the early 1990s. Figueres built on the growing domestic momentum around environmental issues from the Arias years (see chapter 4) and consolidated a green political elite around the *in* term at the time—sustainable development.

Hrabanski et al. (2013) write that in the 1990s, there was a "gradual reduction of the State budget" (128). State actors were still dealing with the consequences of the neoliberal turn in the 1980s and the "governance gap" that was created from this lack of funding. Because of this, Figueres and Castro recruited several fellow Harvard students to return to Costa Rica with them and work as advisors to the government. Although there was a reduced budget at this time, domestic levels of inequality from this era remained low.

The Gini index can help us understand Costa Rica's relative economic equality. The Gini index measures income inequality between the wealthiest and poorest members of a society, with numbers closer to 0 indicating economic equality and numbers closer to 100 indicating greater economic

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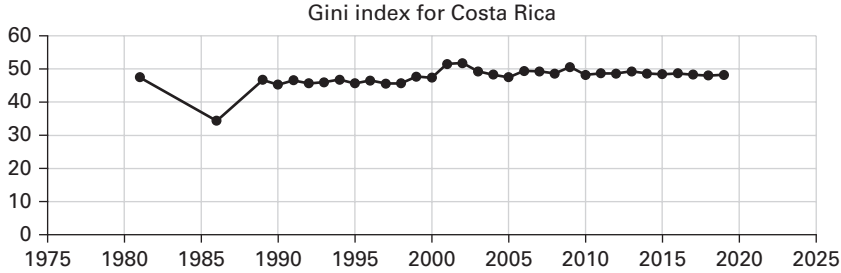

FIGURE 5.1
The Gini index for Costa Rica, gross income per capita. *Source:* Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) via World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform.

inequality. Using numerous published sources, Frederick Solt's Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) data set reveals that income inequality has increased over time in Costa Rica (Solt 2020). Though data are only available from the late 1980s, the Gini index was lower during the 1990s than it was after 2000. Using one particular metric (gross income per capita), the Gini index was 46.8 in 1994, indicating a relatively low level of inequality.

Paulo, a former minister of the environment, explained that the shared educational background "helped" the members of the team because it gave them a "common language." He recalled that several members of this team took classes with the same Harvard professors. Robert, a member of this team and eventual advisor to Figueres and Castro, said something similar. There was a group of professors at Harvard's Kennedy School who specialized in sustainable development and environmental economics, and these professors were very influential to him and the people he was working with. He added that the Harvard coursework required a lot of group projects, which enabled a group of students—Costa Ricans, Americans, and Canadian Americans—to get to know one another well. Robert referred to the time at Harvard as an "incubation" period and as a time when there was a "think tank" of ideas related to sustainable development and environmental economics developing. Barbara, who is from the United States and became a colleague of Robert when they were recruited by René Castro, recalled René trying to "recruit similarly trained people to infiltrate the bureaucracy." Robert remembered that José María's younger sister Christiana served as part

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of the "Figueres team" during her brother's term (see also Vidal 2012). This provides evidence of this new, early 1990s, assembling of a unified green elite. Reflecting on the Figueres years, Juan, an academic, said that Figueres left environmental issues to the people who were involved with it, who had experience with it, who knew about it. This too is a reference to the "team" that Figueres and Minister Castro established.

After Figueres won the 1994 election, several people who had been part of this Harvard "think tank" moved to Costa Rica to put the theories they had learned about climate change into practice with actual policy. Their shared experiences at Harvard helped them do this. As Robert put it, what was interesting about the early 1990s was that there were two "tracks" for climate change. On the one hand was the "academic track," and on the other was the "policy track." At this time, climate change was "more of an academic concept" in part because it was so complex and in part because it involved a lot of ideas about negotiation. Climate change was "mostly a theoretical thing." But in parallel with this academic track was the creation of the UNFCCC and the preparation for COPs 1 and 2. According to him, "no one" knew how to use the academic track to inform and make progress on the policy track. It was in this context that "countries like Costa Rica" then backtracked: "Really only Costa Rica was a policy entrepreneur." There was a sense that having the background of being trained in policy at Harvard would allow Costa Rica to be a "first mover" on climate policy. He elaborated that at this time, "no one was doing anything," meaning that leaders elsewhere were not developing climate policy that would influence on-the-ground circumstances. Climate change remained, at this time, in "the purview of diplomats" rather than policy architects. In contrast, "Costa Rica linked it [climate change] to on-the-ground issues" and monetized that. His judgment was that "no one had done that," thus making Costa Rica's work "very pioneering."

Robert, who traveled to Costa Rica shortly after completing his degree at Harvard in 1994, stayed in the country until 1997, when the focus shifted to the upcoming (1998) presidential election. When I asked Robert, who worked closely with Minister Castro and President Figueres, if he had a formal title during his time in Costa Rica, he said no—that René Castro asked him to come down and "help out" and that was what he did. He also described having "a lot" of work to do at this time. One factor that contributed to the quantity of work, as he put it, was that the Figueres team was working

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on climate initiatives at three scales—the domestic, international, and sometimes regional level. Work at the domestic and global levels dominated the time and attention of the Figueres team, but one regional event was also pivotal.

CENTRAL AMERICAN EVENTS

A significant regional effort during the Figueres years was ALIDES, or the Alliance of Sustainable Development in Central America. According to Segger and Gift (2012), ALIDES "was the first major initiative in the region to establish a comprehensive initiative to address sustainable development in Central America" (455). In October 1994, the presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panamá as well as the prime minister of Belize met in Nicaragua to sign a plan to promote sustainable development in the region. In the ALIDES plan, these presidents express their hope that the plan of action they outline to move toward sustainable development will convert their countries "into a model for other regions," and they call on the international community to support Central America's sustainability efforts (Figueres Olsen et al. 1994, 2).

By this point, Costa Rica was host to the Earth Council, a nongovernmental, civil society–based institution designed to help carry out the objectives of the 1992 Earth Summit (Strong 2020). Maurice Strong, former executive director of the UNEP (Ivanova 2021), wanted the Council based in the global south as a counterpoint to the numerous environmental NGOs based in the global north. Strong (2020) recalled that Costa Rica seemed to him an "obvious choice" for the location of the council in part because it was recognized "as an environmental leader"; the council later encouraged the efforts that led to the regional ALIDES plan. The ALIDES document is part of what Bull (1999) calls the "revival of the Central American integration process" (960).

Juan, a professor from the University of Costa Rica, recalled that in the ALIDES document, each country outlined its plan for achieving sustainable development and that the goals for Costa Rica were pretty easy to meet because it was starting with an advantage. On closer inspection, there is no part of the ALIDES document in which countries outline their plans. This comment, therefore, may reflect a type of Costa Rican exceptionalism.

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GLOBAL EVENTS

The UNFCCC, signed by nations at the 1992 Earth Summit, enabled the emission reduction mechanism of Activities Implemented Jointly (AIJ). This financial mechanism enabled developed countries to finance projects in developing countries that would lead to emissions reductions and allow wealthier nations to count those reductions as their own (Miranda, Porras, and Moreno 2004). This decision was not without controversy; as Michaelowa (2002) notes, beginning in 1993, a "controversial discussion erupted as to whether crediting of projects abroad would make sense," with much of the concern coming from developing nations (260).

While leaders elsewhere in the global south debated whether to engage in AIJ, members of the Costa Rican green elite went straight to political leaders in the United States, expressing their support and interest in the initiative. Robert, one of the advisors, mentioned that an important accomplishment of the Figueres years was that Costa Rican officials established a "link to Washington, D.C." This was an important link not necessarily in terms of resources or information flow, but because "it's good to know people" in Washington. As both he and Tobias, a former minister of the environment, put it, Costa Rican officials developed ties to contacts in the United States Department of Energy (DOE), the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and the Clinton administration. My interviewee Tobias explained that in March 1994—just weeks after Figueres won the national election and still several weeks before his inauguration—he (meaning Tobias) was already in Washington, DC, with a fellow Costa Rican to meet with a contact from the United States DOE. One concrete outcome of this link to Washington was a bilateral agreement that Costa Rican officials signed with officials from the United States on activities implemented jointly (AIJ). On September 30, 1994, President Figueres and Vice President Al Gore signed an agreement on a "pioneering effort to facilitate activities that reduce global carbon emissions through private-public partnerships" (USAID 1994). The agreement was signed in the Indian Treaty Room of the Executive Office Building near the White House. Although the agreement seemed important to the Costa Ricans involved at the time, and although President Clinton (1997) spoke highly about the agreement's ability to incentivize companies in the United States to invest in greenhouse gas emission reduction projects, the agreement

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proved to be, in one highly involved person's eyes, "more symbolic than anything," since the United States and a lot of other countries in western Europe did not hold up their end of the bargain. Barbara, an advisor to the government in the 1990s, however, thought this was a very notable outcome of the Figueres years since it meant that Costa Ricans had arrived at the doorstep of powerful institutions in the United States and asked for help to protect biodiversity and address climate change. As she put it, the Costa Ricans displayed "real agency" and they "throw punches above their weight class," meaning that they engage in policies and decision-making processes that are highly unusual for a small, low- to middle-income country in the global south.

Before July 1995, a national "climate change commission," or a group of climate advisors, met with President Figueres on occasion. As Tobias, a former minister of the environment, recalled it, this was a "transitional stage" before the activities implemented jointly opened and created a flurry of activity in Costa Rica. This domestic climate change commission group preceded Costa Rica's official Office of Joint Implementation (OCIC) staff. After the 1995 Berlin COP, the climate opportunities available to Costa Ricans expanded significantly. A pilot phase for AIJ was established at the Berlin COP (1995) without allowing the emission reductions to be credited toward the emission reduction targets of industrialized nations (Michaelowa 2002). Although this was seen as a compromise to entice developing nations' interests in AIJ, many developing countries declined to be involved. Some countries expressed concern that the international carbon credit schemes of the 1990s amounted to a kind of "carbon colonization" by allowing developed countries to count emissions reductions achieved abroad and thus avoid emissions reductions in their own jurisdictions. Michaelowa (2002) adds that "very attractive host countries, such as China and India did not approve any projects until 1998" (271). In this relative vacuum, Costa Rica became a kind of developing country leader, accepting several projects in the immediate aftermath of the Berlin COP. As Michaelowa (2002) writes, one of the requirements of an AIJ project is the "prior acceptance, approval or endorsement by the governments of the Parties participating in these activities" (261). This was not a problem in Costa Rica, as the green elite enthusiastically accepted AIJ opportunities.

At the 1995 COP1 meeting in Berlin, Costa Rican officials expressed their support for this financial mechanism. Tobias recalled that former minister of the environment Álvaro Umaña (1995) delivered a speech at the meeting, where he was representing "all of Central America," since Costa Rica was the

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only nation in the isthmus to have ratified the convention. In the speech, Dr. Álvaro Umaña (1995) said, "The Central American countries, small in territory but large in diversity, aspire to become a laboratory to show that joint implementation can generate tangible environment [sic], social, and economic benefits, while at the same time reducing greenhouse gases. We consider that our region provides services to the international community that up to now have not been compensated. We aspire to use market mechanisms and incentives wisely to correct this situation and to internalize costs that up to now have been external."

This is an example of how a member of the green elite and former minister of the environment went on to exert additional transnational influence after serving as minister. His speech in Berlin further raised the international profile of what Costa Rica was doing, at a time when leaders in other nations in the global south declined to partake in these projects.

Robert, a member of the Figueres "team," discussed some of the equity concerns that other developing nations held about AIJ, as well as how and why Costa Rican officials pursued this funding. While officials from some nations wondered whether these projects were fair, the team in Costa Rica said, "It's money, guys." As he recalled it, the thinking at the time among Costa Ricans was: "Why wouldn't we take it?" and "It's money on the table." With the financial support from developed countries, Robert believed that he and his team were "setting the example" of how AIJ-funded projects could be done. When he thought more about why China declined projects during the AIJ trial period, while Costa Rica accepted them, really the "primary reason was ideological." Costa Rica has "transparent elections, governance, and the rule of law." China doesn't have any of those things. As he put it, China would say, "Eh, I don't know about this," (carbon crediting projects), and because of China's role as a "big player" in the G77, other developing countries would follow China's path. In contrast, Costa Rican leaders said to each other, "We don't have to follow that path, the China path." With the financing available through AIJ, Costa Ricans saw for themselves a way to chart a new and different climate policy path. Though Robert referred to the differences between Costa Rica and China as "ideological," the differences between these nations are also rooted in historical and evolving class dynamics, as discussed in chapter 2.

Costa Rican officials embraced the AIJ pilot phase. Almost immediately after the pilot phase (1995–2000) began, officials created the Office of Joint

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Implementation (OCIC in Spanish). Within weeks of the COP1 meeting in Berlin, the OCIC office opened (Rojas 2004). It was overseen by the Ministry of the Environment (Miranda et al. 2004). The goal of the pilot phase was to "create practical examples to be analyzed, and through these experiences improve the procedures and requirements needed for the emission projects" (Rojas 2004, 299).

The OCIC operated with a small staff, but the office made significant strides with AIJ projects (Michaelowa 2002). Robert, as well as Gerardo and Humberto, all three of whom were working at this time, echoed these points. They described the small staff as nimble and highly experienced. This speaks to the effectiveness and efficiency of the green elite at this time. Countries in the global south pursued AIJ projects to either enhance their carbon sinks (to capture or sequester greenhouse gas emissions) or reduce their emissions (UNFCCC 2001).

An analysis of AIJ projects undertaken during the pilot phase reveals that the "priorities of host countries" in the global south influenced what kind of emission reduction projects occurred in a specific locale; it is therefore no surprise that among Costa Rica's fifteen projects, eleven were related to forestry as a means to "claim the cost of environmental services executed by private forest owners at [sic] international level" (Schwarze 2000, 260–261).

While on paper the OCIC office symbolized Costa Rica's official commitment to the international financial mechanism of AIJ, in reality, Robert described work from this time as extremely informal; he called the experience very "down home." While they were trying to put what they had learned at Harvard into action, figure out the international standards for carbon credits, and create their own credits, most of this work happened very informally. He told me to imagine a big air-conditioned building—they were the opposite of that. He spoke about casual "to dos," such as driving the minister of the environment around in his car to meetings and having pizza at President Figueres's house to help him prepare to deliver a speech at a United Nations meeting. For example, when the word "focus" would be in a speech, he'd have President Figueres practice saying it twenty times so that it didn't sound like f*** us.

Thinking back to this time, Paulo, a former minister of the environment, said that when OCIC opened, the work was done by a group of "young professionals" and they were "enthusiastic" about the work. They had a sense that they "could do this." Robert called this time "just a group of people trying to do something new" and added that they "wanted this to catch fire

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during the Figueres years." When I asked what he meant by that, he emphasized that there was a four-year term in which to get things done—though later he clarified that it was really only three years since during year four, the next presidential campaign sort of took over. This brief "window of opportunity" (Kingdon 1995) resulted from the fact that Costa Rica's democratic stability and relatively high economic egalitarianism made Costa Rica "more open to trying new things." In addition to this historical context, on top of that, a family came into the presidency (referring to José María and the broader Figueres family) that has been "leading the country for years." This is a family that is "not exploitative;" they are "thoughtful, not corrupt," and he added, "that's exceptional too." They're a "family that's passionate about policy and democracy." So, in his mind, the combination of the Costa Rican context and the presence of José María in the presidency set the conditions for what was possible during these early years.

According to Michaelowa (2002), a decision made by President Figueres and René Castro enhanced the success of Costa Rica's AIJ program; in April 1996, they "enhanced" the office "to be the national authority to address national policies and guidelines for the implementation of AIJ project. It is thus a 'one-stop-shop'" (Michaelowa 2002, 273).

The green elite's enthusiasm about AIJ projects translated into action. As Miranda, Porras, and Moreno (2004) put it, "At the beginning of the 1990s, Costa Rica adopted sustainable development as its economic model. Shortly thereafter she adopted the concept of joint implementation and began preparing different sectors for active participation in AIJ" (12). By 2002, Costa Rica had undertaken twice as many AIJ projects as the nearest Latin American nations, making it the "most developed" host country by the early 2000s and when OCIC staff had challenges with AIJ, these struggles have been attributed to developed (investor) nations' reluctance to sufficiently invest in these projects, not a lack of interest or institutional challenges within Costa Rica (Michaelowa 2002, 273). Costa Rican officials partnered with their colleagues in the United States, Norway, and the Netherlands on these projects.

As this work on climate mitigation-relevant projects progressed, President Figueres took the opportunity to remind international observers of Costa Rica's status as a "laboratory" for sustainable development. In a 1996 publication, he wrote:

> As the community of nations tackles new common challenges, Costa Rica wants to serve and be useful. As a small and poor country, we offer our land and our determination as a contribution to efforts which build livable communities and

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> build hope. We assume our role in these global causes for two reasons. First, we are committed to the worldwide struggle to ensure the existence and well-being of the human species. Second, we feel it is urgent to open a door for our people to a type of development which sees nature as an ally, not a victim. We aim to turn Costa Rica into a pilot project of sustainable development with the hope and expectation that Costa Rica will continue along the path in perpetuity. *Costa Rica is offering itself to the world as a "laboratory" for this new development paradigm—a laboratory in which we can, with help from the international community, design frameworks and mechanisms for a sustainable future*. (emphasis added, Figueres Olsen 1996, 190)

There is a history of Costa Rican political elites drawing on the narrative of peace in Costa Rica, presenting itself as a model or "pilot project" and stating that although it shouldn't be required to undertake certain policies, it has volunteered to pursue them anyway. The quote builds on Costa Rican officials' common tendency to declare itself a "laboratory" for other environmental initiatives (Boza, Jukofsky, and Wille 1995; Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020).

Costa Rican officials carried out the country's first AIJ project in 1996. The project was a bilateral arrangement between Costa Rica and Norway that aimed to improve the Virilla watershed in the central valley of Costa Rica (Fletcher 2013; Miranda, Porras, and Moreno 2004). The watershed is important for providing drinking water and for making hydroelectric power possible. Norway purchased "200,000 hectares of Costa Rican tropical forest for US$2 million for the purpose of carbon storage" (Miranda, Porras, and Moreno 2004, 12–13). Part of the OCIC's work to manage and oversee AIJ projects involved the creation and administration of Certified Tradeable Offsets (CTOs). CTOs are "tradable bonds" that were given to donating countries as proof that carbon emissions have been mitigated as a result of those countries' financial investments (Miranda, Porras, and Moreno 2004, 15). As Robert thought back to the earliest days in Costa Rica's pilot phase for AIJ projects, he added that Costa Rica was "setting the example" of how these projects could be done. Manuel, a natural scientist and activist, added that in 1996, he had the sense that when the first funded mitigation projects happened, there were "no metrics," but this was the beginning of payments for environmental services. This was, as he added, the "beginning of the idea that carbon has to enter the market."

Projects with the Netherlands followed soon after (Rojas and Aylward 2003). These projects built on the country's earlier successes in forestry. Numerous people commented on the "enthusiasm" around climate issues, as

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Costa Rica hosted some of the world's first climate mitigation projects funded by countries in the global north. When I asked Humberto, who was active at this time, about the opening of the OCIC office, he explained that with OCIC there was "optimism" and a "can do" attitude that stretched through the 1990s. As he put it, the country had a clean electricity grid, robust tourism, established national parks, and the mechanisms for the payments for environmental services (PES) program.

We will see in later chapters how these early efforts with climate mitigation projects influenced later climate mitigation commitments. But, for the time being, a quote from one respondent is relevant. I asked Samuel, a former minister of the environment who knew about the efforts to assemble the decarbonization plan in 2018, whether the decarbonization plan built on earlier pledges, like the 2006 carbon neutrality pledge. He said, "Yes, without a doubt." But he provided a longer historical narrative for the decarbonization plan. In his mind, the ideas in the decarbonization plan built not only on the neutrality pledge but also on ideas that emerged earlier from the UNFCCC. As he put it, before carbon neutrality, they worked on the theme of climate mitigation since the 1997 COP meeting in Kyoto, Japan. Then he went back further—before Kyoto, he added, Costa Rican officials were doing joint implementation projects. He recalled the Costa Rican carbon credit trade with Norway, described earlier. As he recalled it, in Costa Rica, the green elite was waiting for an international market for carbon credits. When it came time to do the decarbonization plan, "all of these ideas were on the table." It can be seen that Costa Rica's narrative on climate mitigation policy moved forward in a very significant way with the first AIJ project and extends through the decarbonization plan.

DOMESTIC EVENTS

There was also an active domestic environmental agenda during the Figueres years. Interviewees who had relevant experience or knowledge to be able to speak about the 1996 forestry law and the payments for the environmental services program tended to see this as an important moment in Costa Rica's climate policy narrative. In reflecting on the "high points" of Costa Rica's environmental history that led to the decarbonization plan, Samuel, a former minister of the environment, believed that the 1996 forestry law was one of these points.

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In 1996, the Costa Rican legislative assembly passed a new forestry law that created the Payments for Environmental Services (PES) program (Evans 1999, 180; Miranda, Porras, and Moreno 2004, 11). The previous (1990) Forestry Law (No. 7174) had created FONAFIFO, the National Forestry Financing Fund (Daniels et al. 2010, 2119), but it was not until after 1996 that FONAFIFO's "functions and responsibilities increased significantly" (Bollman and Hardy 2014, 197). FONAFIFO oversees the PES program and serves as the bank for the program. Costa Rica's PES program was the first "nationwide and long-term" PES program from the tropics (Arriagada et al. 2009, 344).

Initially, the money to fund the PES program came from a tax added to the "consumption of any crude-oil" derivatives (Zúñiga 2003). The 1996 Forestry Law 7575 included a provision stating that fully one-third of the money gained from the fossil fuel consumption tax would be allocated to FONAFIFO (FONAFIFO 2018). However, internal disagreements with the Ministry of Finance meant that this percentage was reduced in subsequent years. The Fiscal Reform Law of 2001 made it so that 3.5 percent of the tax on fossil fuels went to FONAFIFO (Pagiola 2008). While this is a significant drop, Pagiola (2008) writes that this law "guaranteed this amount" of tax dollars to be given to FONAFIFO (713). A document from FONAFIFO reflects this view of the 3.5 percent tax: "This determination *reflects a clear vision of the legislator*, by establishing a source of financing that guarantees the sustainability of the Program" (emphasis added). Subsequent financial support for FONAFIFO has come from a variety of sources including the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility (Pagiola 2008, 713). Also, when the OCIC sold certified carbon bonds, FONAFIFO profited (Miranda, Dieperink, and Glasbergen 2006, 565).

I asked Paulo, a former minister of the environment who had knowledge from the Figueres years, how adding this tax on fossil fuels was possible, knowing that it would be difficult if not impossible in many other contexts due to political elites' economic ties to fossil fuel extraction (Fisher 2004). He explained that the idea at the time was that they were going to pay landowners for their services with *domestic* money. And they "always thought *foreign* money would pay for climate change and biodiversity." But, he added, "It didn't happen," meaning that sufficient funds from abroad have not come to Costa Rica to pay forest stewards for the environmental services their land provides to the global community. While there were internal political

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challenges to the idea of "earmarking" the tax for a specific purpose (paying landowners) (Zúñiga 2003), Paulo added that the carbon tax ultimately was a "good agreement with farmers" and that members of the legislative assembly (especially those representing rural areas) were convinced that voting in favor of the carbon tax was good for the people they represented. Members of the legislative assembly were convinced that people in urban areas would pay the cost of the tax and that it would benefit people in rural zones. Interestingly, this appears to have been an effort to redistribute wealth from the urban core (the GMA) out to more isolated and more economically marginalized people in rural areas (see chapter 3).

The PES program pays landholders if their land provides one of four services: mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, hydrological services, biodiversity conservation, or scenic beauty (Pagiola 2008). Paulo added that including climate mitigation as one of the four services recognized by the PES was the historical moment when Costa Rica used its success in forestry to transition to its early work on climate mitigation. Secondary sources back this up. Although climate mitigation is only one of four services recognized by the PES, Fletcher (2013) writes that the program "was Costa Rica's first concerted effort to conjoin forest policy with the growing global effort to address anthropogenic climate change" (158).

When the new forestry law passed in 1996 and created the PES program, climate change became one of the "fundamental themes" of the moment, said former minister Paulo. He said the government added "additional services" by adding the four services to this law. Of these four services, two had local impacts and were meant to benefit Costa Ricans: scenic beauty and watershed services. The idea was that Costa Ricans would pay for these services, but they would also benefit from these services. The other two services, carbon sequestration and biodiversity, were added to help the global community. They also believed that the money would come from abroad to pay for these services. As he put it, they were "naïve" in believing this. The money did not come then and still has not come today to pay for climate change and biodiversity in Costa Rica. The decision to include two services with local functions and two with global benefits is interesting. It reflects the fact that Costa Rican leaders not only acted as defensive environmentalists, by for example protecting local waterways for fellow Costa Ricans, but also that leaders had the freedom to engage in a more altruistic environmentalism by

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including carbon sequestration and biodiversity, both of which would assist geographically distant people (Rudel 2014). This decision reflects Costa Rica's elevated level of development by the early 1990s (see chapter 2).

Samuel, a former minister, and Félix, an academic and advisor to the MINAE, saw the 1996 forestry law under Figueres as one of the most important moments in Costa Rica's trajectory in climate policies. Both noted that the norms for the PES program were established during the Figueres years but that it took until the Rodríguez years (1998–2002) for the system to show real benefits. Félix said that the PES program "changed the face of this country."

There was a sense among some interviewees that Costa Rican political elites pursued climate initiatives in the 1990s as a way to stand out as a "thought leader" and thus attract more international funding. As reported at the beginning of this chapter, Robert, one of the government advisors, explained that in the 1960s and 1970s Costa Rica received substantial financial support from abroad, especially the United States, but by the 1990s this support had slowed significantly. The money had dried up because, to the United States, Costa Rica was the "golden child" and qualified as a "middle income country." Therefore, he said, leaders in Costa Rica saw climate change and sustainable development as the way to get international funds—by being "a thought leader" in these two emerging areas. A former minister, Samuel, explained that because Costa Rica's level of development was so high during the late 1990s, the country had to find other sources of money to fund their projects. In this context, bilateral aid became important. Research backs up these respondents' recollections of Costa Rica's financial position in the 1990s. As Wilson (1998) shows, development aid from USAID to Costa Rica reached its peak in the early 1980s, before gradually decreasing in the late 1980s, and reaching pre-economic crisis lows by the early 1990s (120).

After the opening of the OCIC office, the AIJ trial period, the creation and international sale of CTOs, the new forestry law, and the creation of the PES program, Costa Rican officials entered the negotiations ahead of the 1997 Kyoto COP meeting with significant "project-based experience" (Rojas 2004, 299). Rojas (2004) explains that by this point the government was "very fond of the market and project-driven approach" and thus "the national delegation strongly supported the introduction of flexible mechanisms in the Kyoto Protocol" (300). As we will see in the following chapter, Costa Rican officials' background experiences with emission reduction projects did not translate into broad enrollment in Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)

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projects, but in fact led to a sense that Costa Rica was too ahead of the curve to benefit from the CDM. In this context, the green elite had to develop a creative solution to propel the country further along its climate mitigation policy path.

DOMESTIC ENERGY ISSUES

An economy that is not founded on the extraction of fossil fuels means that more members of the elite can make decisions free from the influence of these industries. As such, in the 1990s, the Costa Rican government pursued several opportunities to generate additional electricity from renewable sources. In 1990, Costa Rica passed law 7200, which allows ICE, the Costa Rican Institute of Electricity, to purchase limited quantities of electricity from private companies exploring the potential of sourcing it from hydraulic and other nonconventional sources (Poder Legislativo 1990, 1). This law was amended in 1995 (Law 7508 of May 9, 1995) for the rational use of energy and the use of alternative sources of energy. This law enables private enterprises to produce energy from renewable sources (geothermal, hydro, and wind, or other sources) in small quantities (50 kW or less) (Poder Legislativo 1990, 5), and it increased the amount of renewable energy that ICE could buy from small-scale private generators from 15 to 30 percent (Figueres Olsen 1996, 198).

By 1996, 72 percent of Costa Rica's electricity came from hydroelectric sources, but the government wanted to expand capacity that could be generated from other sources, including wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass because of "extended dry spells" (Figueres Olsen 1996, 197). Figueres Olsen (1996) explained this in an article on the state of affairs of sustainability in Costa Rica, in which he said the following: "Under this administration we have ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), have become the first Central American country to complete an inventory of our sources and sinks for greenhouse gases, and have set an ambitious goal of moving away from fossil fuel and toward almost complete dependence on renewable energy sources for electricity generation by the end of the century. Our new 'Rational Use of Energy' law encourages reductions in greenhouse gas emissions" (191–192).

It is remarkable that leaders in a small, low- to middle-income country in the global south expressed concern about the "rational use" of energy in the mid-1990s.

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Although carbon neutrality and decarbonization became more salient in later decades, evidence suggests that even members of the green elite during the Figueres years discussed these commitments. Again, it is unusual that in a country with a majority of its electricity coming from renewable sources, planners were concerned, in the mid-1990s, with minimizing fossil fuel usage. Evans (1999) writes that Figueres was "in the forefront of the changes and worked to institute a nationwide energy policy to phase out the use of fossil fuels for power generation by 2010. His aggressive energy program included levying a 15 percent national fuel tax (at the expense of one of the most unprecedented popularity drops in recent Costa Rican history) to pay for reforestation projects and to reduce emissions" (251–252).

Paulo, a former minister, called the 2006 carbon neutrality pledge the "formal aggregate" of what Costa Rica had adopted in the 1990s. During the Figueres years, policymakers weren't talking about carbon neutrality per se, but they were discussing how to have negative emissions or zero emissions. Robert added that there was a discussion about getting off fossil fuels during his time working with President Figueres and Minister Castro. At the time, decreasing the country's reliance on fossil fuels "may not have been seen as a big stretch"; in other words, it seemed possible given the country's smaller carbon footprint. Robert's colleague Barbara echoed this when she explained that officials in the Figueres administration were working on energy supply issues and said that they were "trying to be zero emissions."

SUMMARY

As the title of this chapter makes clear, the mid-1990s was a period of expansion in environmental and climate policies in Costa Rica. Class structure, governance, and the green elite mattered for moving these policies forward. Costa Rica developed policies at this time because: it had achieved high markers for social development; a consolidated green "team," as called by interviewees, came together and devoted themselves to climate issues; and José María Figueres himself—his background and his biography—helped move the needle on sustainable development and climate mitigation policies.

First, as many interviewees discussed, this was a time when tiny Costa Rica was visible on the global stage due to the cascading positive impacts of Óscar Arias's 1987 Nobel Peace Prize. By the early 1990s, tourism became the largest contributor to the GDP (Daniels 2010; LePree 2008–2009). Between 1986 and

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1995, the number of foreign tourists visiting Costa Rica more than tripled (Evans 1999, 227). Costa Rica experienced an economic boom and enjoyed a desirable reputation among foreigners. This helped Costa Rican planners carry out certain climate initiatives like climate mitigation projects during the AIJ trial period. Countries like Norway saw investments in Costa Rica as a safe bet, and rightly so. Costa Rica enjoyed continued political stability and, as one person put it, was seen as the "golden child" by the United States. To be clear, these achievements do not imply that Costa Rica's environmental problems were solved—far from it. It is worth remembering that rates of deforestation had only begun to decline in recent years as the price of beef on international markets declined (Daniels 2010). In a comparative sense, however, Costa Rica was stable and relatively developed. Interestingly, this stability had a downside: Costa Rica no longer required development assistance. In a context of declining aid dollars and rising global concern about sustainable development and climate change, the Costa Rican green elite got creative.

As this chapter recounts, they were quite successful in doing so. In 1994, members of Costa Rica's green elite established an agreement with the United States by essentially showing up and asking for one. Costa Rica acted differently from other countries in the G77+China by being open to receiving foreign dollars to develop greenhouse gas emission reduction projects. It is during this time that the Costa Rican green elite became emboldened and began to be internationally recognized in the climate space. For example, former minister of the environment Dr. Álvaro Umaña spoke on behalf of all Central American nations at the 1995 Berlin COP meeting.

This is part of the story, but not all of it. Who did this work, and how did they do it? During Figueres's years in office, a green elite, or as some called it a team, of people coalesced around climate-relevant initiatives. They seized the global community's attention around sustainable development and tried to figure out what opportunities this created for the Costa Rican context. This translated into a partnership (even if largely symbolic) with the United States, domestic initiatives around clean energy, and movement on global opportunities, like AIJ. This team included members from the relatively unified elite subculture in Costa Rica (José María Figueres, René Castro) as well as international students who studied alongside them at Harvard. The background "press" dynamics (increasing attention to sustainable development, rising global significance of climate change, and rising global average temperatures) combined with a relatively rapid "pulse" dynamic—the assembling of this

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group and its ability to understand each other and make things happen—pushed Costa Rica's climate mitigation policies forward during the Figueres years (Collins et al. 2011).

Sustainable development, however, reached global significance in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which President Calderón, not President Figueres, attended. How did the leaders of the mid-1990s—specifically President Figueres and his minister René Castro—make a difference in Costa Rica's policies? Interviewees mentioned several facets of Figueres's biography that helped move climate policies forward at this time. Of course, Figueres belongs to the liberal PLN party. For Juan, an academic, this mattered since the environment is a higher priority for this party than others and because environmental leaders tend to have more connections with the PLN than with other parties. Other people explained that climate change wasn't really a priority for Figueres but that he and René Castro saw the ability to bring in foreign money from issues that were relevant to climate mitigation, such as the PES program and ecotourism. Carlos, an employee at the Climate Change Center, said that the concept of ecotourism was made in Costa Rica. It was, as he put it, "the idea of the Figueres cabinet." Humberto, a former advisor to the government, added that when he was in an advisory role to the president, it was important to have the president tuned into and aware of those same issues. With Figueres, he "had his ears"; at this time, "climate change was perceived as relevant." Samuel, a former minister of the environment said that Figueres was important because he was "the first president to talk about sustainable development," and Miguel Ángel Rodríguez's term was important because that's when the country made progress with the PES. But he had nothing to say about how Rodríguez himself mattered for Costa Rica's climate policy narrative. When thinking about Costa Rica's climate mitigation policy narrative, Félix, an academic and advisor to the government, called Figueres "not a small player." He specifically mentioned the importance of the development of the PES program.

Emilia added that while other Costa Rican presidents might be better known internationally for taking on "flashy" climate policies, it would be Figueres who "took the hit" (meaning, would be perceived negatively) for his work on environmental issues. Figueres added the fossil fuel tax, made strides with reforestation, got the payments for environmental services program going, and went to the COP meeting in Kyoto. As she put it, Figueres

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brought the topic of climate change to Costa Rica, which at that time wasn't really thinking about that as an issue.

Paulo and Tobias, two former ministers of the environment, explained that Figueres's background mattered in the development of the PES program. As Paulo put it, it was "very important" that Figueres had been the minister of agriculture before being president. This prior experience gave Figueres a "conscience" about things that influenced farmers and people in rural areas more generally. Culturally, he added, the Figuereses are a "very rural" people, and "forest themes" had been very important to his father (José "Don Pepe" Figueres Ferrer). This background gave José María a way to discuss complex issues like forest services with farmers in an easily understandable manner. For example, Paulo added, they used to speak to farmers about being "oxygen producers." What he was trying to convey is that various dimensions of Figueres's background helped expand the success of the PES program. It was a combination of Figueres's family culture and professional background that helped make the new forestry law and the PES program a success. José María's support for the PES program conveys that he, like his father (see chapter 2) was devoted to economic redistribution (from the urban core to rural fringe areas). Tobias added that José María "became a very articulate leader for sustainable development and still is."

According to Barbara, Figueres and Castro "wanted sustainable development to be a big thing." She had experience working with other governments and talked about how unusual the Costa Rican context was. When she and Robert, another Harvard graduate, were recruited to serve as part of Costa Rica's delegation to the COP, it was "an honor." "We worked *for them*—not the other way around." She said lots of other countries would have an American lawyer representing a country, but for Costa Rica, Álvaro Umaña was *the chair*, again referring to Álvaro Umaña representing all of the Central American nations at the 1995 Berlin COP meeting. Costa Ricans were leading their own delegation, and to her this was very significant. There was, as Barbara put it, "real agency" in Costa Rican political elites. Thinking specifically about the roles and the work of René Castro and José María, she added, "They're policy guys . . . They're policy wonks. They had very substantive ideas about making a difference in the world." They "had a vision" and their interest in policy and climate "comes from a very real place." Her comments reflect the core themes of this book: Costa Rica's elevated level of

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development and the leadership style of Costa Rica's green elite mattered for pushing the country's policies forward.

Barbara's colleague Robert also reflected on the importance of Costa Rica's relative economic egalitarianism, elevated development, and green elite dynamics in shaping environmental policies during these years. When I asked him whether this era mattered for climate policies because Figueres brought something special to efforts to address climate change and sustainable development, or whether it was a consequence of the post-Earth Summit global context, he said both. Part of what made Costa Rica able to try new things was the "very export oriented" nature of Costa Rica's economy and history as well as its democratic tradition, its absence of large landholders, and Costa Rica's relatively egalitarian economic and social context (see chapter 2). But then he added, you "have a family come in" that has been "leading the country for years." Robert described José María's term as a time for the entire Figueres *family* to return to the presidency and continue the work it started after the civil war. This family is "not exploitative"; "they're thoughtful, not corrupt," and "that's exceptional too." The Figuereses are "passionate about policy and democracy." Robert was talking about José María the individual but couldn't help but connect him to his broader family. He said that it was important to keep in mind how exceptional it was to have a leader like Figueres in power in 1994. This was a few years after Noriega, in Panamá, was locked up. As he put it, "The smoke had just cleared." Guatemala had a high crime rate, and Honduras was on the cusp of going downhill. His point was that things were not stable nearby and "Costa Rica was the convenience store with its lights on" in a dark neighborhood.

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6 A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY (2006–2010): "PEACE WITH NATURE"?

> Abolishing net carbon will be, for us, the equivalent of the abolishment of the army that Don Pepe [Figueres] did and the pacification of Central America, which we achieved during my first presidency.
>
> —Óscar Arias Sánchez, 2007, *La Nación*

> "There was no feeling [in Costa Rica] that you could do that anymore. We're not that poor to think we're going to sacrifice nature for some gold. We're not that desperate." Civil society was active and protesting. Overall, Arias's handling of Crucitas was a good example of something where you see "that discrepancy, that problem," with Arias.
>
> —Field notes from interview with Humberto, advisor to the government

On February 5, 2019, *New York Times* readers awoke to a startling headline: "Former President of Costa Rica Is Accused of Sexual Assault." The article detailed the shocking sexual assault allegations made against former president Arias by a PhD-holding anti-nuclear activist (Robles 2019a). By the next day, a total of four women had made similar accusations against him (Robles 2019b). An article published on February 10 described the challenges women faced in accusing a Nobel laureate of certain heinous acts (Malkin and Robles 2019). The accusations revealed, unequivocally, that the "Me Too" movement had arrived in Latin America and that even a revered statesman was not free from the movement's influence. Arias has denied the charges. For unknown reasons, some of the women eventually dropped the complaints against him and did not continue the legal battle (AP News 2020). My 2019

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fieldwork took place six weeks after the accusations were made against Arias. It is impossible to separate the sexual assault allegations made against Arias from what interviewees told me about climate action during his second presidency.

Óscar Arias occupies a complex position in Costa Rican society. Many people see Arias as a divisive figure and although this sentiment was amplified in the wake of the 2019 sexual assault allegations, some interviewees explained that the allegations confirmed the severity of Arias's abuses of power, but its existence was well known. Some Costa Ricans love him, claiming that he "put Costa Rica on the map" for first-world tourists, and attribute Costa Rica's enormous growth in ecotourism to Arias's peace efforts from the 1980s. Other Costa Ricans dislike him and his policies—particularly his economic policies. As we will see in the coming pages, Arias's image has historically been disjointed. In front of an international audience, he is admired, while at home, he has faced significant criticism.

When I asked interviewees to walk me through Costa Rica's timeline of climate mitigation policymaking, most jumped from discussing actions that took place during the mid-1990s to those that occurred during the mid-2000s. In this chapter, I show how the green elite developed climate mitigation policy during Arias's second term (2006–2010). In the previous chapter, covering the period from 1994 to 1998, measures of domestic inequality stayed constant and relatively low (Gini index in the mid-40s, see figure 5.1) and measures of Costa Rica's development were high. This combination created a context that helped the green elite take on climate-relevant projects. During Arias's second term, we see a more complex picture. As my interviewees told me, Costa Rica's elevated level of development led members of the green elite to adopt the carbon neutrality pledge since the climate mitigation opportunities available to countries in the global south were not useful in Costa Rica. As some people I spoke with described it, Costa Rica was "too developed" to benefit from the climate mitigation mechanisms that could assist other (read "less developed") countries. In this context, a small group of presidential advisors from government, science, and business was assembled to move Costa Rica's climate mitigation policies forward in an ambitious and bold way. Advisors took advantage of the president's international image—the entire branding of this era, *Peace with Nature*, was oriented around Arias's 1987 Nobel Peace Prize. However, this is a complicated time because income inequality was increasing, fueled by the Great Recession.

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This context encouraged some of the same people who had worked on the carbon neutrality idea to also make the decision to allow gold mining at Las Crucitas, a decision that stunted progress and enthusiasm around climate initiatives.

2006 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

During his first presidential term, Arias signed a "constitutional amendment to create a constitutional chamber of the supreme court" (Wilson 2012, 33). As Nathan, a researcher from the United States with many years of experience conducting research in Costa Rica and advising the Costa Rican government, put it, this amendment had the important consequence of allowing civilians to bring lawsuits against one another. This new fourth chamber became important generally to life in Costa Rica and gained significant attention in the new millennium. In 2003, the court "overturned a 1967 constitutional amendment barring presidential reelection" (Wilson 2012, 33). This change made it possible for Arias to run for president again. This change was not without its critics. In an opinion article published in the newspaper *La Nación* in March 2004, former president Luis Alberto Monge (1982–1986) called presidential reelection a "defiance of the constitution" and spared no words when he argued that there had been a "coup" in Costa Rica (Monge 2004). In the run-up to the election, Arias held significant polling margins over candidate Ottón Solís, yet he won by a very narrow margin (Wilson 2012, 34). Although my respondent Félix recalled that Arias won by a landslide—which he attributed to Arias's "capture" of various interest groups—the election was so close that a manual recount of the ballots was ordered (Al Jazeera 2006). Thus, even how Arias regained the presidency is a point of contention among Costa Ricans.

Arias's second term also quickly became mired in controversy over his support for the Central American-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), a treaty that Arias argued was important for Costa Ricans in the age of globalization (Wilson 2012). After significant popular disapproval of the treaty, Arias called for the country's first national referendum on the treaty. Although support for the treaty narrowly won out in the October 2007 vote (Broad and Cavanagh 2015; ElectionGuide 2023), the protests against the treaty became one of the most significant popular movements in recent Costa Rican history (Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020). As my

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interviewee Emilia put it, Arias is a polarizing figure in Costa Rica because some of his fiscal policies have led to the concentration of capital. A report from 2013 showed that while the average standard of living had improved in Costa Rica during the first ten years of the new millennium, overall economic inequality had increased (*Tico Times* 2013b). And a separate analysis from 2015, five years after Arias left the presidency, reveals that while CAFTA has diversified the kinds of jobs available to Costa Ricans, it also makes Costa Rica's economy highly dependent on the economy of the United States and has contributed to social problems like a "brain drain," with young people leaving Costa Rica to find work elsewhere, and growing domestic inequality (*Tico Times* 2015).

Félix, an academic and advisor to government, explained that when Arias won the 2006 election he was "delighted." He had voted for him and was glad to see him win. Arias's victory followed Abel Pacheco's term (2002–2006). It was "refreshing" to have Arias as president after Pacheco, since Pacheco was a "granddad" and was "senile." (Pacheco turned seventy years old while in office.) He added that Arias could complete a full sentence and make sense!

Arias selected Dr. Roberto Dobles Mora, his distant cousin (Marchena Sanabria 2016), to serve as minister of the environment. Dobles had previously served as the executive president of the Costa Rican Institute for Electricity (ICE) and as minister of science and technology. Dr. Dobles was trained in the United States as an engineer, went on to graduate school in western Europe, and in the 1980s, served as the executive president of RECOPE, the Costa Rican Petroleum Refinery (RECOPE 2023). Another respondent named Juan, an academic, explained that due to Dobles's background, he knew more about electricity and mines than he did about "the environment." As Juan put it, Dobles didn't have a background in environmental issues, but only ended up in the hot seat for decisions related to mining, including the mess at Las Crucitas mine since he had to sign pertinent documents as the minister. Juan contrasted Dobles to Jorge Rodríguez Quirós, who served under Dobles as vice minister of the environment. As both Juan and William, a former minister of the environment, put it, Dobles's approach and work was in stark contrast to that of Rodríguez, who had a lot of connections with environmental issues because he was a forestry engineer who had previously served as the director of the National Office of Forestry (ONF).

Other respondents were less kind in their descriptions of Dobles. Félix and Manuel, a biologist and a civil society advocate, both called Dobles "the

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devil," even though their interviews were separated by four years. Both characterized Dobles this way because of his role in the Crucitas gold mining debacle. Félix echoed Juan's point, that Dobles had little if any background or interest in managing "environmental"—meaning nature-based—issues. Dobles was "polarizing" because he was in favor of oil exploration, arguing that it would be good for business and good for lobby groups, and Félix explained that there may be people I interview who love him and others who hate him.

Contrasting initiatives undertaken during José María Figueres's term, Félix believed that Arias and Dobles were more of the belief that nature should sign a peace deal with business and industry, not the other way around. Samuel, a former minister of the environment, with experience in government, academia, and international environmental NGOs said nearly the same thing; he recalled that during Arias's term, there was more of a theme of either "people *or* the environment." He viewed Dobles as very polarizing and said that during the Arias/Dobles years, people in conservation thought (for the first time) that the employees at the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE) were "enemies" of conservation. However, Costa Rica made international headlines with its carbon neutrality pledge in 2007. How did this happen, and how should we make sense of the contrast between the domestic and international perceptions of Costa Rican leaders of this time?

PEACE WITH NATURE INITIATIVE

Within the first year of Arias's term, a presidential committee formed and began work on several environmental initiatives. In some ways, this group of advisors was similar to the members of the team that worked together during the Figueres years. The committee during the Arias years comprised members of Costa Rica's relatively unified elite subculture (chapter 3 and table 6.1). Most of the members of this committee were highly educated people from the Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA). Unlike the "team" that some recalled during the Figueres years (where President Figueres and his Harvard training mattered for uniting this group), Arias himself had very little to do with the environmental plans that took shape during his presidency. Instead, this high-level committee of advisors brought the ideas to him and/or Minister Dobles, and they generally supported the advisors' ideas. As we will see, the Arias presidency represented a window of opportunity for putting forth a

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Table 6.1
Peace with Nature committee members

Name	Position
Steve Aronson	Business owner / entrepreneur
Roberto Artavia	Member of directory council of the Central American Institute of Business Administration (Instituto Centroamericano de Administración de Empresas, INCAE)
Carlos Benavides	Minister of tourism
Paul Bornemisza	Business owner / entrepreneur
Mario Boza	Conservationist and former director of National Parks Department
Mario Carvajal	Business owner / entrepreneur
Kevin Casas	Ex–vice president of the republic
René Castro	Professor of sustainable development at INCAE, former minister of the environment
Laura Chinchilla	Second vice president of the republic
Roberto Dobles	Minister of the environment and energy (MINAE)
Luis Diego Escalante Vargas	Ex–minister of commerce
Rodrigo Gámez Lobo	President of the National Institute of Biodiversity (Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad, INBio)
Winnie Hallwachs	Biologist, University of Pennsylvania
Daniel Janzen	Biologist, University of Pennsylvania
Pedro León Azofeifa	Biologist, University of Costa Rica (chair of committee)
Alejandrina Mata Segreda	Vice minister of education
Kenton Riegel Millar	Expert in global affairs
Manfred Peters	Business owner / entrepreneur and ex–vice minister of the environment
Alfio Piva Mesén	Biologist
Adriana Prado	Actress and presidential consultant
Carlos Manuel Rodríguez	Vice president of Conservation International (Also, former minister of the environment)
Jorge Rodríguez Quiros	Vice minister of the environment and energy (MINAE)
Bruno Stagno	Chancellor of the republic
Álvaro Umaña	Ex–minister of the environment
Carlos Uribe	Business owner / entrepreneur
*Álvaro Ugalde	Biologist, conservationist, former director of the National Parks Department

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Table 6.1
(continued)

*Carolina Mauri	Costa Rican Olympic swimmer, lawyer
*Sylvia León Koberg	Daughter of Pedro León (chair of the committee); hired as writer and fundraiser
*Jorge Polimeni	Government consultant to the MINAE (1996–2007), biologist, creator of NGO Fundación Bandera Ecológica
*Óscar Arias Sánchez	President

(*Source:* Ponchner and Vargas 2007)[1]

national pro-environmental initiative centered around peace, the theme for which Arias earned global recognition in the 1980s (Kingdon 1995).

As a result of this committee's work, in December 2006, the government released a statement announcing that it had begun a campaign called "Peace with Nature" or in Spanish *Paz con la Naturaleza* (Poder Ejecutivo 2006). My respondent Humberto compared the "Peace with Nature" motto under President Arias to the "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan of United States President Donald Trump because Peace with Nature was not a policy but rather a slogan or a branding for the presidential term. Sergio, an employee at the National Institute of Meteorology, described Peace with Nature as a campaign designed to raise public consciousness about climate change.

Pedro León Azofeifa, a University of Costa Rica scientist, chaired the Peace with Nature committee. The committee consisted of thirty people and included representatives from industry, government, science, and other prominent members of Costa Rican society (e.g., an Olympian). Pablo, one of my respondents who served on the committee, explained that Peace with Nature was supposed to be a project from the president, and as he recalled it, the Peace with Nature idea emerged from a 2006 meeting between President Arias and Álvaro Ugalde, conservationist and former head of the National Parks Department (Evans 1999). As Pablo, a friend of Ugalde, put it, Ugalde met Arias on a plane and said to him, "You know, you brokered peace in Central America" during your first presidency. "Why not broker peace with nature during your second?" According to Pablo, Óscar Arias supported the idea of Peace with Nature because "he likes daring stuff." Arias's early support for the idea led to subsequent work on the initiative.

According to Pablo and Humberto, who had extensive knowledge from this time period, the Peace with Nature committee members agreed to work

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on three goals: (1) establishing a trust fund for the national parks, (2) carbon neutrality, and (3) a "greening" of the public sector. No one interviewed for this project described the process of deciding on these goals as contentious. No one described a process of deliberating between goals or even between specific climate mitigation policies. Field notes from a 2013 interview with Gustavo, an employee at the Climate Change Center (DCC), a government office created at the end of Arias's second term, reveal how nonchalantly people involved described this time period. When I asked him about the process that led to the pledge announcement, he said the process was not contentious and that what happened during the Arias years was a consequence of actions begun during the Figueres years, specifically the projects advanced during the AIJ trial period that allowed wealthier, developed countries to fund emission reduction projects in poorer, developing countries (see chapter 4). From this experience, he explained, Costa Rica didn't sell a lot of CTOs (Certified Tradeable Offsets), but it developed a vision of what it could be and what it could do. This vision reemerged during the Arias years. Instead of being a contentious process to agree on the Peace with Nature goals, the subgoals of the committee reflect the diverse interests of the committee members. Álvaro Ugalde, one of the former directors of the National Parks Department, championed the idea of establishing a permanent fund to protect the parks. Carbon neutrality emerged from a group of advisors who had been involved in climate policies for several years. And the interest in "greening" the public sector emerged from people in academia and government.

The absence of disagreement in interviewees' descriptions may be surprising at first glance, but it makes sense when we recall the lessons from chapter 3. Given the small number of people in the elite, and the small-scale social structure where people in positions of power know each other, have worked together before, and foresee future opportunities to work together again, committee members had a high incentive to support the committee's goals (Ott 2000). A closer look at table 6.1 also makes clear that many of the people serving on the Peace with Nature committee were not experts in climate change science or climate change policy specifically, a reflection of Costa Rica's status as a developing country (see chapter 3). Though this was a highly knowledgeable group of people, the committee's lack of expert knowledge about the problem of climate change likely facilitated the ease with which members on the committee agreed on the Peace with Nature initiatives. Moreover, given that the committee adopted fairly vague, highly

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symbolic, and difficult-to-measure goals, agreeing to the goals was a low-stakes commitment.

CARBON NEUTRALITY PLEDGE

Though originally conceived of as just one of several goals under the Peace with Nature initiative, the carbon neutrality pledge has had a kind of enduring legacy that has not been the case with the other goals under the Peace with Nature initiative. Most presidents since Arias have at least mentioned the neutrality goal. Some Peace with Nature committee members made progress on the idea of establishing a trust fund to protect the national parks, but they largely moved this work outside of politics after the Crucitas mining disaster. Committee members made the least progress on the idea of "greening" the public sector, though recently this issue has gained more traction and will be discussed in the following chapter.

Of the three objectives, the carbon neutrality pledge brought the most global attention to Costa Rica. In part, this has to do with the circumstances under which Costa Rican officials announced the commitment. In Gustavo's description (he helped write some of the emission reduction plans after the pledge was officially announced), minister of the environment Roberto Dobles announced the Peace with Nature initiative and the carbon neutrality pledge at the February 2007 United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) governing council meeting in Nairobi, Kenya. Minister Dobles became the president of the governing council at this meeting. As Gustavo and Rodrigo (another former minister of the environment) recalled, the government made a strategic decision to highlight Costa Rica's domestic work on climate change at this international forum. It was, as Rodrigo put it, a way to "get the word out" about what Costa Rican planners were doing. This is another example of a key moment, like President Arias's 1987 Nobel Peace Prize, when a Costa Rican political elite held a position of global significance and in that moment brought international attention to Costa Rica and its policies.

In his opening remarks at the UNEP governing council meeting, Dobles (2007a) said: "Coming from Costa Rica, a country where the sustainable management of natural resources has been a state policy and where peace has also been part of our way of life (we abolished the armed forces in 1948) I am very honored to serve as President of UNEP's Governing Council and

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Global Ministerial Environment Forum. We have now declared Peace with Nature in our country and this concept is now at the center of our development and trade policy" (7). In later months, Minister Dobles continued to spread the word about Costa Rica's commitment in front of international audiences (Dobles 2007b).

As Manuel, a biologist and civil society advocate, recalled, it was a group of government advisors that envisioned the carbon neutrality pledge, but "science is one thing, politics is another," so it had to be a political figure that announced the neutrality commitment. Immediately after saying that, Manuel talked about how Arias announced Costa Rica's pledge. In July 2007, the government organized a major kickoff event in San José to announce the Peace with Nature initiative to fellow Costa Ricans.

What *is* the actual carbon neutrality pledge? Simply stated, the pledge was a stated commitment that the government plans for the country to become carbon neutral. Becoming carbon neutral means reducing emissions and then balancing remaining emissions with emissions that have been offset or sequestered (see footnote 1 from chapter 1).

Gustavo, who was involved in the early days of the neutrality efforts, said that when Costa Rican planners thought about a "carbon neutral Costa Rica," they envisioned schools, businesses, and institutions "going" carbon neutral by taking stock of emissions and then reducing and/or sequestering emissions. As he put it, "everyone has homework" when it comes to neutrality.

From the early days, Costa Rican planners paired the neutrality pledge with the commitment to achieve the goal by the year 2021, the bicentennial anniversary of Costa Rican independence. Tatiana, who was involved at this time, explained that the justification for writing the follow-up plan to the pledge (The National Strategy on Climate Change) was the prospect of achieving the neutrality goal by 2021. She recalled Minister Dobles saying to her, "What better goal could there be to celebrate our 200 years of independence than to be carbon neutral?" She thought that reaching carbon neutrality by 2021 was the "principal reason" that motivated the committee's efforts. For Pablo, attaching the 2021 target date to the neutrality pledge was "a political move," and was maybe even a "stunt" but he thought the target date was still "very brave" since setting the goal in the near future meant that politicians had to act immediately to try to curtail emissions. Rodrigo, a former minister, saw the pledge as a way to advance both Costa Rica's global climate mitigation efforts by reducing greenhouse gases and its domestic work on environmental problems by improving local air quality.

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There was general agreement that at the time of the announcement the committee did not have data or simulations to prove Costa Rica could achieve neutrality by 2021. Gerardo, a top official involved with the earliest efforts for carbon neutrality and someone who had about a decade's worth of prior experience in climate issues, emphasized that from the beginning the neutrality pledge was a "political strategy." He described carbon neutrality as "political discourse"; "We never did the exercise or work that was involved, what we should have done." Then, he backtracked and said, well, "we never did a strong effort." For Humberto, who had worked closely with Gerardo, the metrics of neutrality were never clear. He asked rhetorically, "What *is* neutrality?" before addressing his own question: "We never had real metrics." Pablo, who had served on the Peace with Nature committee, explained that the committee had no science to back up the pledge when they announced it—a description shared by fellow advisors Gustavo and Manuel, as well as Ignacio, another former minister of the environment from a different presidential era. Lorenzo, a staff member of the Climate Change Center, called the pledge completely political and said that the technical part of carbon neutrality and of emissions in general did not exist during Arias's second term.

Only Rodrigo, a former minister of the environment, was confident in the scenarios and simulations produced ahead of the announcement, and no one (including him) could produce documents showing these calculations. As Rodrigo put it, in their plan, reduced emissions and emissions sequestered via forests worked out to net zero by 2021.

Several days after making a national announcement about the neutrality pledge in San José, President Arias (2007) published an article in *La Nación*. In it, he drew a throughline from notable events in Costa Rica's past—the abolition of the armed forces and his Nobel Peace Prize—to the neutrality pledge. He even used the same word (abolish/*abolir*) to help draw this connection. He wrote, "Abolishing net carbon will be, for us, the equivalent of the abolishment of the army that Don Pepe [Figueres] did and the pacification of Central America, which we achieved during my first presidency." His comments position the carbon neutrality pledge as the next event in Costa Rica's unusual political tradition (Flagg 2018).

As described elsewhere (Flagg 2019), Rodrigo, a former minister of the environment, explained that adoption of the neutrality pledge did not require the approval of the unicameral legislative assembly because the pledge is a policy, not a law. He did not think it was necessary to make the pledge a law back in 2007 or in 2015, at the time of our interview. In his opinion, when you make

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something a law, you "introduce bureaucrats." Instead, from his perspective, carbon neutrality operated best as an optional practice, with interested companies choosing to conduct an emissions inventory, pay to offset the remaining emissions, and eventually be certified as carbon neutral. So, the idea of making carbon neutrality an optional policy that all businesses were invited to participate in, and none was required to do, seemed advantageous to him due to its neoliberal approach. The government encouraged all subnational institutions to become carbon neutral but did not require any to do so.

Respondents had different ways of explaining the origin of the neutrality idea. The carbon neutrality idea became popular, in a global sense, during the mid-2000s. For example, many colleges and universities in the United States signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) during the "charter" period of December 2006–September 2007 (White 2009). In addition, some cities in the United States participated in the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) campaign, which called for cities to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions (Zahran et al. 2008). Analysis of newspaper data reveals that several nations made neutrality pledges between 2007 and 2009 (Flagg 2015). It is possible that the different perspectives about the origin of the neutrality idea reflect interviewees' different positions and membership in different networks.

Juan, an academic, explained that the neutrality idea didn't come from President Arias. As he put it, Arias is very smart, but climate policy is not his specialty. Instead, the idea emerged from various sectors. He mentioned specifically the importance of Álvaro Ugalde and environmentalists from the National University of Costa Rica who were worried about local environmental contamination in San José. "The politics of carbon neutrality were building over time" due to concerns about local air pollution, the burning of fossil fuels, and an interest in finding additional sources of energy. He emphasized that concerns about high levels of air pollution in and around San José contributed to the formation of the pledge. He also, however, stressed that Arias's idea about the "Consensus of Costa Rica" played an important role in the development of the neutrality pledge. In a speech Arias delivered at the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September 2009, Arias (2009) explained how the world should forgive more of Costa Rica's foreign debt and support countries like Costa Rica that invest in education and the environment. Though he did not specifically say that Arias's speech led to the neutrality declaration, he believed that Arias's idea about the "Consensus"

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and the need for other countries to support Costa Rica's domestic achievements reflected sentiments from this time.

Luis, another academic who had served in an advisory capacity after the neutrality announcement, elaborated on this idea that the politics of neutrality grew over time. He said that the idea of neutrality had been "gestating" in Costa Rica for some time before Dobles's official announcement. As we will see in the next chapter, interviewees recalled a similar process with Costa Rica's decarbonization pledge. Tatiana, who helped write the National Strategy on Climate Change plan, explained that before the specific idea of neutrality emerged, some people were thinking about other ways to reduce emissions. Specifically, she remembered that there was some interest in reducing emissions from vehicles operated by public institutions. She recalled that some of the ministries at this time were changing their vehicle fleets to lower-emissions cars, such as hybrids, and that some private industries, like hotels, were trying to reduce emissions.

As Tatiana put it, when government officials went to talk with hotel managers about the idea of carbon neutrality, they discovered that managers were very supportive. Going carbon neutral was, in their minds, a way to gain an advantage or a "competitive plus." When I told her that it seemed like there was a good amount of interest in reducing emissions before the official neutrality pledge, she said "Yes" but that these efforts were "isolated." Some of the efforts were from the public sector, some were from the private sector, and others were from academia, so they had to work to put it all together. The pledge allowed this to happen.

RATIONALES FOR CARBON NEUTRALITY

When interviewees contemplated the reason for Costa Rica's neutrality pledge, they often mentioned one or both of the following rationales. Some members of the green elite said they adopted the pledge because the international mechanisms for climate mitigation from this time did not advance mitigation efforts in Costa Rica. In addition, some others claimed that the pledge was an opportunity to demonstrate Costa Rican leadership to the global community. These explanations are distinct but also related.

Countries with objectives to reduce emissions under the Kyoto Protocol had the opportunity to engage in "flexible mechanisms" to meet those emission reduction targets. The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) was one

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of these mechanisms. It allowed wealthier countries with emission reduction commitments to fund emission reduction projects in developing countries and then for those emission reduction credits to be counted toward the emission reduction targets of the wealthier nations.

In contrast to the Figueres years, during Arias's second term, members of Costa Rica's green elite became more visible in international climate meetings. For example, after their experience opening the OCIC office and developing projects during the AIJ trial period (chapter 5), by the time the Costa Rican delegation went to the 1997 COP3 meeting in Kyoto, Japan, it was "very fond of the market and project-driven approach," and the delegation "strongly supported the introduction of flexible mechanisms" in the Kyoto Protocol (Rojas 2004, 300).

Projects approved through the CDM were required to "provide emission reductions that are *additional* to what would otherwise have occurred" (UNFCCC n.d. The Clean Development Mechanism; emphasis added). The seventeen CDM projects that Costa Rica hosted are listed in table 6.2 below.

Members of the green elite who were active during Arias's second term told me that either because the CDM was not useful in Costa Rica or because Costa Rica had difficulties obtaining funding for CDM projects, they instead adopted the neutrality pledge.

Gustavo, from the Climate Change Center (DCC), explained that he and others made the neutrality pledge because the CDM was not very useful in Costa Rica. In his mind, the CDM was not helpful because the country had already reforested a lot of land and because it had already established an electricity grid with a high reliance on renewables. He added that the country had reforested with the PES program and had developed the national parks. For electricity, he added that by 2012, 93 percent of the electricity matrix came from renewable sources. Therefore, as he put it, "the flexible mechanisms did not help" in Costa Rica. When the government contemplated its progress on climate change at the start of the Arias presidency, it said, "We [meaning Costa Rica] are in the middle of a river. We can either go backward or we can go all the way." They decided to go forward by adopting the neutrality pledge.

Gerardo, a former colleague of Gustavo, said that the CDM's requirement of "additionality"—or reducing emissions beyond what would have occurred in the absence of the project—was why the mechanism failed to meet some Costa Ricans' expectations. Again, "additionality" refers to the requirement

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Table 6.2
List of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects in Costa Rica

Number	Date Registered	Title	Other parties
1	04 Dec 2012	Chiripa Wind Project	Not listed
2	05 Jun 2008	CEMEX Costa Rica: Use of biomass residues in Colorado cement plant	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
3	15 Apr 2011	Los Mangos landfill gas capture and flaring project	Not listed
4	30 Nov 2007	Switching of fuel from coal to palm oil mill biomass waste residues at Industrial de Oleaginosas Americanas S.A. (INOLASA)	Switzerland Netherlands Germany
5	11 Jun 2012	Los Santos Wind Power Project	Netherlands Germany
6	23 Mar 2007	Tejona Wind Power Project (TWPP)	Netherlands
7	27 Mar 2012	El General Hydroelectric Project	Netherlands
8	13 Oct 2005	Río Azul landfill gas and utilization project in Costa Rica	Netherlands
9	03 Dec 2012	EVCSA Wind Power Project	Not listed
10	28 Dec 2012	Torito Hydroelectric Power Plant	Not listed
11	14 Oct 2012	Orosí Wind Power Project	Germany
12	03 Mar 2006	Cote small-scale hydropower plant	Canada, Netherlands, Finland, France, Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Japan, Norway
13	26 Aug 2014	Biogas recovery and heat generation from palm oil mill effluent (POME), COOPEAGROPAL	Not listed
14	27 Dec 2012	Chucás Hydroelectric Project	Not listed
15	09 Mar 2007	La Joya Hydroelectric Project	Spain
16	03 Oct 2012	Carbon sequestration in small and medium farms in the Brunca Region, Costa Rica (COOPEAGRI Project)	Canada, Italy, Luxembourg, France, Japan, Spain
17	11 Feb 2011	Guanacaste Wind Farm	Netherlands

(*Source:* UNFCCC Clean Development Mechanism [CDM]: Activity Search n.d.)

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that CDM projects must reduce emissions below what would have occurred under business as usual circumstances, or in the absence of the project (Michaelowa 2009). The country already had a very clean electricity grid and the payments for environmental services program, but Costa Rican projects for clean electricity and for the PES program were "on the baseline"; they did not go above the baseline, as was required by the CDM. Humberto explained that this was the context before Arias's presidency, but by the time he came into office, policymakers agreed that Costa Rica was not where it wanted to be in terms of global climate policy. To him, the CDM was "a disaster," so when he and other top climate advisors met with Dobles at the start of the Arias years, they explained to the minister that the country needed "a new approach." Out of this meeting came the idea to pursue carbon neutrality as a broad theme. Carbon neutrality was a "political strategy." Luis, an academic and advisor, echoed Gerardo. Between the national achievements in reforestation and the clean electricity grid (estimating the share of renewable sources of electricity to be at about 98 percent), "we already did a lot." In his view, the CDM was meant to help *other* countries combat deforestation. Speaking about Costa Rica, "We needed something to push the agenda," and that something became the neutrality pledge—because the functions of Kyoto did not work there. This comment, like some of the others, stresses a kind of Costa Rican exceptionalism that has long historical roots (chapter 2).

Humberto, who was also involved at this time, agreed that problems with the CDM led to Costa Rica's neutrality pledge, but he disagreed that the CDM had been a "disaster." In his view, what led to the neutrality pledge was that "Costa Rica had been struggling" to launch CDM projects, but it was very visible for its PES program, reversing deforestation, and clean electricity grid. He talked about how Costa Rica managed to initiate some projects for alternative energy (see table 6.2) but was unable to take on projects related to afforestation or reforestation. In the early days of the CDM, the notion of additionality was an important idea, and there was a sense that Costa Rica was a "victim of its own success" since it already had a renewable electricity grid, the PES program, and an impressive national parks system; however, existing projects were facing the issues of "additionality." Given the challenges Costa Rica faced in getting new projects financed through CDM, members of the green elite started to think that they might as well jump to the kinds of commitments that Annex I (wealthier, developed) Parties were making. As Humberto put it, the country had a chance "to aspire" to something more ambitious in

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terms of climate mitigation and discussed how the development of the clean electricity matrix led to the feeling that it could be possible for Costa Rica to go carbon neutral.

There was a second rationale that interviewees expressed. It is distinguishable yet shares some features with the one discussed previously. For some interviewees, the neutrality pledge was an opportunity for Costa Rica to "lead by example." As Juan explained, there are many historical examples of Costa Rican officials adopting this kind of language (see also Flagg 2018). Respondents invoked different ideas related to the theme of leadership. For some, leadership was about defining what it meant to be carbon neutral. Since so few other countries were even thinking about neutrality in the mid-2000s, some saw a real chance to get ahead of the curve and define national standards for neutrality. There are deep historical roots for this kind of rhetoric in Costa Rica, with many leaders describing Costa Rica as a "laboratory" where ideas about tropical conservation (Boza, Jukofsky, and Wille 1995), sustainable development (Figueres 1996), or a myriad of other environmental issues (Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020) can be tested before being applied elsewhere. Some also wanted to lead in a moral sense, while others saw an opportunity and value in leading because other nations had failed.

Humberto described the opportunity of defining what neutrality meant and making Costa Rica into an example that other countries could follow. When Costa Rican planners were discussing neutrality, leaders in only a few other countries were having the same conversation. In this context, doing neutrality early or first meant that Costa Rican policymakers could "define neutrality" and get rid of the issue of additionality. He was especially interested in the idea that going carbon neutral could "activate local markets for carbon" by enabling emissions trading at the local level. Humberto supported the carbon neutrality goal "whole-heartedly" at the beginning, with the provision that policymakers would be serious in their climate mitigation efforts and that they would apply that same seriousness to climate adaptation efforts. He supported neutrality, though neutrality is an "export product but adaptation is for us." When I asked what he meant by "export product," he said it was an opportunity to take leadership in the issue, that the "only" reason to do neutrality is that Costa Rica might show the world how it can be done. Costa Rica could do it as an example—"not as a sacrifice" but rather "because it was doable." Neutrality, and getting some Costa Rican products labeled as carbon neutral products, was an opportunity that the minister of

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FIGURE 6.1
A photograph of a banana with a sticker "Produced Carbon Neutral." *Source:* Author.

the environment and the president saw to "lead" and, specifically, to "lead with economics."

Maybe, he said, Costa Rica could show the world that going carbon neutral was not that difficult to do. As a final thought on this point, he added, as others did as well, "What we do is irrelevant to global climate change." Costa Rica's emissions are so small that changes to its national emissions profile do not influence the global trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions.

Humberto explained that Costa Rica is a small country with a tradition of being visible in human rights and the environment, so going carbon neutral "seemed like the right moral thing to do then." In his view, if climate change is going to be solved, the whole world needs to go neutral eventually. As we will see below, several other interviewees also mentioned this morality rationale for adopting the pledge.

Continuing on this theme of leadership, a few interviewees mentioned that the failure of other (wealthier) nations to commit to emissions reductions in the mid-2000s served as a motivation for some members of the

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green elite to be a climate leader and to "go" carbon neutral. As Tatiana put it, proportionally to the United States, China, or Europe, Costa Rica's emissions are minimal; however, just because Costa Rica's emissions don't matter on a global scale, that doesn't mean *Costa Ricans* don't matter. She added that they had to show large, industrialized countries that Costa Rica can do something—it can develop innovative policies. Bernardo, a university official who was working to certify companies that have met the standards for achieving carbon neutrality, explained it as follows: "You must have countries like the United States pledging to reduce emissions. In Costa Rica, we produce less than 1 percent of global emissions, but we wanted to be an example. We wanted to say to the United States, to China: we're poor, we're developing, but we're going carbon neutral. Why can't you?"

Victor, a staff member at CORBANA (the National Banana Corporation), also emphasized this point. He emphatically said that in terms of total global greenhouse gas emissions, Costa Rica's are "nothing, like .001 percent." So, the carbon neutral pledge was important for "prestige at the national level" and to be "an example." In other words, interviewees saw the neutrality pledge as an important, symbolic gesture that would draw attention to the failure of other countries to commit to emission reductions. Julieta, another staff member at the Climate Change Center, added that Costa Rica announced the pledge at a moment when there was a sharp divide between the responsibilities of Annex I Parties and the rest of the world. In contrast to assuming that any and all emissions reductions should come from wealthier countries in the global north, Costa Rica said, "No, we all have to do something," and this was "very important." Interestingly, in this way, Costa Rica was ahead of the curve in global climate politics, since the voluntary pledge and review framework agreed to as part of the Cancún Agreement at the Durban meeting in 2011 would usher in the next era of global climate politics—one in which all nations, not just wealthy, developed ones, would be called on to adopt emission reduction commitments (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015).

Beyond these two major rationales, interviewees occasionally mentioned another rationale that helped give way to the pledge. Rodrigo, Gerardo, and Humberto believed that a strong rationale for "going neutral" during Arias's administration was because it was possible to achieve the goal given emission rates at the time. These claims did not come from climate scientists; however, these interviewees were highly educated and involved. Two people

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Table 6.3
Carbon dioxide emissions (metric tons per capita) in Costa Rica

Year	Carbon dioxide emissions	Year	Carbon dioxide emissions
1990	0.91	2006	1.50
1991	0.95	2007	1.71
1992	1.25	2008	1.67
1993	1.23	2009	1.58
1994	1.39	2010	1.54
1995	1.35	2011	1.59
1996	1.24	2012	1.57
1997	1.20	2013	1.62
1998	1.31	2014	1.62
1999	1.29	2015	1.54
2000	1.24	2016	1.62
2001	1.34	2017	1.64
2002	1.34	2018	1.62
2003	1.38	2019	1.56
2004	1.40	2020 (last year available)	1.36
2005	1.45		

(*Source:* World Bank 2023b)

who expressed this idea have graduate training (a PhD and a master's degree), and another is an engineer. Humberto explained that in the mid-2000s Costa Ricans had small per capita emissions and there were estimates at the time that it would be possible to achieve the neutrality goal. Emissions data from the World Bank (2023b), listed in table 6.3, show that per capita carbon dioxide emissions were in fact markedly higher in 2007 than they had been in the mid-1990s.

Pablo, a member of the Peace with Nature committee added that a less publicized but, in his mind, critical rationale for the neutrality pledge was the ability of Costa Rica to achieve energy sovereignty. Although Costa Rica has received much international attention over the past few years for its almost exclusive reliance on renewable sources of electricity (Zúñiga 2020), the country's *energy* system remains highly dependent on imported oil, mostly for transportation. Pablo saw the possibility of switching to clean energy as creating a huge cost-saving opportunity by diminishing the country's reliance

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on foreign oil to fuel gasoline-powered vehicles. Cars remain an important marker of social status in Costa Rica, particularly in the GMA (Timperley 2020). As of 2021, Costa Rica had Latin America's third highest rate of car ownership (behind only Argentina and México), making petroleum to power vehicles an essential part of Costa Rican life (Lacqua 2021; Schmidt 2021).

The pledge announcement created the impulse for the government to actually fulfill the commitment (Flagg 2019). As Gerardo put it, the neutrality commitment was a "political strategy," but then officials and advisors asked themselves, how do we "make this happen"? After politicians announced the pledge at the global UNEP meeting and in San José, there was some movement to encourage emissions reductions. Also, members of the green elite established a process to monitor and verify that a business had reduced and offset remaining emissions.

Advisors to the government, members of the green elite, wrote the ENCC, the National Strategy on Climate Change. This plan, published in 2009, outlines the country's broad domestic and international agenda regarding climate change (MINAET 2009). This plan, while imperfect, showed a commitment by planners to move from symbolic politics to a plan with some substance (Flagg 2019). The plan outlined emission reduction strategies across sectors, though it excluded numerous sources of emissions, such as those from flights of tourists visiting Costa Rica (Flagg 2020). Overall, it showed a commitment to action, but remained quite vague in its exact goals.

Tatiana, who helped write the National Strategy document, provided some context so I could understand how she joined the group that wrote this plan. In the 1990s, when Roberto Dobles was the minister of science, innovation, technology, and telecommunications, she too had worked at that ministry. They knew each other. So, during Arias's second term, when Dobles was serving as the minister of the environment, Dobles called her to come and work with him on the National Strategy document. "He knew me," she said. Tatiana described temporarily working at the Ministry of the Environment to draft the plan and then returning to the other ministry afterward. Although I could not get an institutional perspective to understand whether Tatiana truly moved across ministries with such ease, her description of this process recalls lessons from chapter 3 about the degree to which political mobilization happens quickly (in this case, to write a national strategy on emission reductions) among urbanized, interconnected members of the green elite.

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After writing this strategy document, Gerardo and the rest of the team at the DCC started to develop the "Plan of Action"—a plan that gave the neutrality pledge *más sentido*, or "some teeth." Subnational action following the pledge came from various institutions that reported their emissions (Flagg 2019). Individual hotels, banks, airlines, and banana companies reported interest in reducing emissions and receiving the certified carbon neutral stamp to display to their customers. With the help of the Costa Rican Institute of Technical Norms (INTECO), a process was established to verify that a company had reduced and offset remaining emissions (Flagg 2019).

LAS CRUCITAS MINING DISASTER

While President Arias's presence, specifically the opportunity his advisors saw in designing a climate pledge around the themes of peace and environmental protection, shaped the coming together of the Peace with Nature initiative, it also played a key role in the disintegration of the committee. The Crucitas mining scandal led to the disbanding of the Peace with Nature coalition. According to Pablo, the Peace with Nature committee's work was successful for about six or seven months, but then Minister Dobles announced that Costa Rica would allow gold mining at the open-pit mine at Las Crucitas. To him, "As they say in the United States, that is when the shit hit the fan."

Conflicts surrounding the exploitation of subterranean minerals are not new in Latin America (Bebbington and Bury 2013; Rudel 2018). Though Costa Rica's economy has never been based on the extraction of these resources, Costa Rica is not exempt from the kinds of conflicts that have plagued other nations. As discussed in chapter 2, part of the reason why Spanish colonizers did not imprint themselves more fully in the territory today known as Costa Rica is because of the small deposits of gold they found there; places elsewhere, with larger mineral deposits, were more desirable to the Spanish (Evans 1999; Mahoney 2010). However, there was more gold in Costa Rica than the colonizers initially realized, and for a brief moment, before the rise of the coffee economy, gold did play a role in Costa Rica's economy (Broad and Cavanagh 2015).

Significant amounts of gold exist in the Osa Peninsula, the southwestern coast of Costa Rica (see figure 2.1). By the 1960s and 1970s, a significant number of economically precarious *oreros*, or small-scale gold miners, had moved into the territory, an area of exceptional biodiversity. Corcovado

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National Park, located on the peninsula, is one of the only remaining old-growth tropical wet rainforests in Latin America, and concern about its vulnerability to mining encouraged President Oduber to make it a national park in 1975 (Evans 1999). To this day, it remains a remote region of the country. Gold deposits were also discovered in Costa Rica's north, along the border with Nicaragua. Las Crucitas is located in this northern region, in the *cantón*[2] of San Carlos in Alajuela province. The mine is near the San Juan River, the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua (see figure 2.1).

By 2002, or half a decade before the Peace with Nature initiative, Costa Rica was facing the "damaging effects of open-pit mining" (Holland 2020, 293). By this point, Costa Rica's economy was highly dependent on nature-based tourism, to which mining presents a clear and serious threat. Mining in ecologically sensitive regions harms flora and fauna. The threats from open-pit mining prompted President Pacheco to enact a "decree" on new open-pit mining. According to Pablo, banning by "decree" was the first mistake in the Crucitas debacle, and he wished that the legislature had instead worked to pass a more difficult-to-overturn law prohibiting mining altogether.

Pablo explained that when Minister Dobles announced the opening of gold mining at Las Crucitas, he told the minister that doing so was a bad decision in and of itself and that it was a terrible contradiction of the work they were doing to promote Peace with Nature. Dobles pushed carbon neutrality very strongly but "failed to understand" the consequences of allowing mining at Las Crucitas. Pablo described work on the Peace with Nature initiative after the Crucitas decision as "a constant arm wrestle." He added that former National Parks Department director Álvaro Ugalde, whom he identified as the person who conceived the Peace with Nature idea in the first place, left the committee because of this contradiction and the general lack of progress being made.

In October 2008, Arias overturned President Pacheco's ban against mining (Broad and Cavanagh 2015, 424). He did so in the name of the "national and public interest" (Holland 2020, 293), making it possible for open-pit gold mining to begin at Las Crucitas. Infinito Gold, a Canadian mining company, owned the mine and estimated that it held over one million ounces of gold (Holland 2020, 293). Once the ban was repealed, Infinito moved quickly to begin clearing yellow almond trees from the mine, the nesting location of the Great Green Macaw, a bird that is native to Costa Rica (BirdLife International

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2024; Holland 2020). As of this writing, the bird's habitat has been significantly harmed and the species is critically endangered (BirdLife International 2024).

Both Félix and Humberto talked about how destructive it was that gold mining began in Las Crucitas, a highly biodiverse and vulnerable ecosystem with endangered tree species. The Environmental Justice Atlas (2022), a website that maps environmental justice conflicts around the world, estimates that at Crucitas, there are more than 130 species of trees per hectare. Sustained, large-scale mining at Las Crucitas would have entailed significant ecological and social costs. Beyond the obvious losses to flora and fauna destroyed by opening a crater, open-pit mining exposes rocks with a large amount of sulfur to the atmosphere. When, in tropical places like Costa Rica, heavy rain falls on this newly exposed geology, acid moves from the rocks into nearby waterways, contaminating it. The toxic chemicals used to extract valuable minerals also run off into local water and soil, polluting the human and nonhuman environments (EarthJustice 2002).

After Arias overturned the ban on mining, parties on both sides of this conflict worked diligently to change the terms of this case. Infinito got straight to work clear-cutting trees in this biodiverse and sensitive ecosystem; however, further efforts by Infinito to ramp up gold mining stopped in October 2008, the same month in which Arias overturned the ban, when Costa Rican activists "won a court-ordered halt to Infinito's activities" (Broad and Cavanagh 2015, 424).

Fueled by this victory, but seeking a more permanent solution, activists from both the northern part of the country nearer the mine and incensed activists and academics from San José sought to permanently ban mining through legislation (Broad and Cavanagh 2015; Holland 2020). Sources indicate that at least 80 percent of the Costa Rican population, and possibly as high as 90 percent, was in opposition to gold mining at Las Crucitas (Broad and Cavanagh 2015; Holland 2020; Moore 2015).

In subsequent years, Infinito faced challenges in Costa Rican courts, where the mining project was struck down. In late 2010, a more permanent protection against mining was put in place when the Costa Rican legislature banned new open-pit metal mining projects (Broad and Cavanagh 2015; Holland 2020; Murillo 2021). Infinito Gold tried to sue the Costa Rican government on the basis of lost compensation from the Crucitas debacle. The matter was settled by The International Centre for Settlement

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of Investment Disputes (ICSID), an institution based in the United States and affiliated with The World Bank, which is tasked with resolving disputes between investor organizations and nations (ICSID 2024). In 2021, the ICSID determined that Costa Rica did not owe Infinito Gold the nearly half a billion dollars it sought in damages from the long delays it experienced in its efforts to mine for gold at Las Crucitas (Murillo 2021).

Both President Arias and Minister Dobles were involved in court proceedings after they signed a decree deeming mining at Crucitas to be "in the public interest." Both were accused of taking bribes as part of the deal with Infinito. For his part, Arias was accused of receiving a nearly quarter million dollar donation to the Arias Peace Foundation he created with the funds from his 1987 Nobel Peace Prize from a billionaire shareholder of Infinito Gold (Holland 2020). Charges were brought against Arias for his involvement in the Crucitas scandal. In February 2019, just a few weeks after several women accused Arias of sexual assault, the judge of the trial involving Arias ruled that the "statute of limitations for bringing Arias to trial has passed" (Zúñiga 2019). A prosecutor plans to "appeal the dismissal of the charges against Arias," but "if the appeal fails, the case will remain closed and Arias will not be brought to trial" (Zúñiga 2019). Reflecting on the consequences of the Crucitas disaster during our March 2019 interview, Humberto said, "Arias has been nailed for that now" and "He has a mess in his hands."

Minister Dobles was not quite as lucky as Arias, though he got away relatively unscathed. Dobles was charged with "issuing the permit without a proper environmental impact assessment and in violation of environmental laws" (Holland 2020, 294). In January 2015, a criminal court in San José sentenced Dobles "to a three-year suspended sentence for breach of public duty" in granting Infinito Gold a mining concession at Las Crucitas (Arias 2015). Dobles did not, however, serve any jail time. Dobles was also barred from holding public office for several years. Félix described Crucitas as "borderline legal if not outright illegal" and added that Dobles has been punished for his role.

Respondents had a lot to criticize about Arias's mismanagement of the Crucitas case. Several accused him of grossly mishandling it. For example, Félix said Arias is "captured by influence groups": when you're this kind of leader, "you govern and legislate in favor of those" influence groups, even when you say you're "protecting nature." About Arias's role in Crucitas, he said that Arias had to declare mining at Crucitas to be "in the public interest"

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in order to "push aside environmental protections." He compared it to declarations of war; when a president declares war, he has to say he's doing it in the public interest. This declaration allows a leader to push away regulations and protections that are in place and that would have overseen or regulated that activity. He went on to say that Arias "did away with all of those laws" by allowing mining there. Félix described how vulnerable Costa Rica is to the effects of mining. As excerpted from my field notes, he said:

> Mining is highly destructive to the environment, even when it is done right. It pollutes the water. Mining in Costa Rica is not like mining in Chile. In Chile, mining happens in the deserts where there are no people, nothing, no sensitive ecosystems. Even there, there is some opposition to mining. But this is not the same as in Costa Rica. Costa Rica is a small nation. Its ecosystems are linked, interdependent. Mining could have massive impacts on Costa Rica broadly. If it truly was "in the public interest" mining would have to be *extremely* beneficial for Costa Ricans. It is not.

Humberto saw that everyday Costa Ricans strongly rejected Arias's approach to Crucitas. The population of Costa Rica "didn't believe it was ok to sacrifice a little nature for a payoff." Again, estimates from polling data are that at least 80 percent of Costa Ricans opposed gold mining at Crucitas. What might have worked, he theorized, was a little less economic benefit with more benefit for nature. But missing this opportunity was, as he put it, Arias's miscalculation. In Humberto's mind, Arias could have said, let's take a few hundred million less from our economic gain and let's put it toward nature and forestry, which would have more than compensated for the consequences of mining. But Arias didn't do that. Reflecting on how Arias could have done things differently, Humberto added: "You have to be *more than neutral* with nature." In his view, the government could have bought a new park with profits from Crucitas. The government could have seriously compensated for the economic gains of mining, but it needed a big deal with nature. The deal was, as he put it, not there; it was just about economics in exchange for nature. Humberto put in very stark contrast Arias's approach and the reactions and feelings among the general population: "There was no feeling [in Costa Rica] that you could do that anymore. We're not that poor to think we're going to sacrifice nature for some gold. We're not that desperate." He added how active civil society was in protesting the mine. Overall, he called Arias's handling of Crucitas a good example of something where you see "that discrepancy, that problem" with Arias.

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While many people were outraged over the handling of the Crucitas mining case and some specifically elaborated on Arias's failure at this moment, Pablo explained that while allowing gold mining at Las Crucitas was a loss for the green elite's work on climate mitigation and an environmentally damaging situation, it was at least somewhat balanced by the government's decision not to drill for oil at about this same time. Nicaragua had just found oil off its Pacific coast; Costa Rican officials took note of this discovery and wanted to explore for oil and pursue natural gas exploration. Pablo recalled telling government officials that if the government were to pursue oil exploration, it would go against what the government was "projecting" with Peace with Nature. A meeting took place between some Peace with Nature colleagues and Minister Dobles, as well as representatives that the minister brought from RECOPE (the Costa Rican Petroleum Refinery), the minister's former employer. Describing the scene of this meeting, Pablo added that after the meeting, President Arias ultimately decided against supporting oil exploration, which would have been another very significant threat to Costa Rican biodiversity.

In May 2009, President Arias declared to the Costa Rican Congress: "We will continue with our commitment to not permit oil exploration on Costa Rican soil" (Watkins 2009). This announcement came as a surprise to many since the Arias administration had a track record of showing interest in offshore exploration. As early as May 2006, the very month in which he assumed the presidency, Arias said that RECOPE was "in accord" with Brazil's Petrobras "in studying the feasibility of oil exploration 50 miles off the coast" (Watkins 2009). As Pablo put it, the more environmentally conscious Peace with Nature committee members had one victory (the president rejecting the possibility of offshore oil exploration) and one loss (the government allowing mining at Las Crucitas). Subsequent presidents (Chinchilla, Solís, and Alvarado) extended Costa Rica's moratorium on petroleum exploration (Tudela 2020), but as of this writing, the long-term nature of fossil fuel exploration in Costa Rica remains uncertain. We will take up this topic in the final chapter.

Nathan, a biologist who works for a university in the United States and whom I interviewed in 2019, called the decision not to drill an important moment in Arias's term and gave Arias credit for making the right, and difficult, choice. He said that there had been some talk about oil reserves in the expanse of sea between mainland Costa Rica and the Isla del Coco off

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the Pacific coast (see figure 1.1). There had been some talk about drilling, but Arias did not allow it. In his perspective, leaders elsewhere would have allowed drilling. While Costa Ricans doubt Arias's motivation about other things, Nathan thought it mattered that he rejected the opportunity to drill. It is worth adding that Nathan had an overall critical view of working within the Costa Rican bureaucracy: at several points in our conversation, he shared his perceptions about the extent of corruption throughout Costa Rica's political system, including but not limited to Óscar Arias. Even with that, however, Nathan considered Arias to be one of the really good leaders: "Every once in a while a small country gets a great leader." The decision to avoid offshore drilling was an environmental victory from the Arias administration, one that may not have gone the same way in a different political context. This comment recalls some of the lessons from chapter 2, about how historical class dynamics are an important driver in contemporary climate politics.

SHORTCOMINGS AND BENEFITS OF PEACE WITH NATURE AND THE CARBON NEUTRALITY PLEDGE

The Crucitas case dampened much of the Peace with Nature coalition's enthusiasm around ambitious climate change policy since it revealed so clearly the tension between environmental protection and development. But if we look beyond this particular case, interviewees had a lot to say about the consequences, both negative and positive, of the neutrality pledge specifically and the Peace with Nature coalition's work more generally. Some expressed frustration with the pledge's implementation and with the committee. Gerardo, who had been part of the work on neutrality since the earliest days, commended the "vision" of the Peace with Nature coalition and the neutrality goal specifically. But, he added, the neutrality goal was still "lacking" a lot, especially in terms of transportation. Following up on this, I asked Gerardo whether the pledge did any harm, meaning did it take attention away from other, perhaps more pressing issues such as the health and environmental consequences of traffic and transportation in the greater San José area? He said, no; "the damage," he explained, is not from the goal itself, but from not accomplishing the goal by 2021, which has not occurred.

Gerardo's colleague Humberto also expressed frustration about the Peace with Nature initiatives. Plainly, he said, "I was not happy with the implementation" and called it very slow. When I asked him to elaborate, he said

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that the country was slow to develop national carbon markets and to push the neutrality idea.[3]

This led him to a second but related critique: the definition of neutrality. He asked rhetorically, "What is neutrality?" and then added, "We never had real metrics." Although he was not as involved during these years, he still expressed a general frustration with the way things were handled with the neutrality pledge after the fanfare surrounding the initial announcement. Ignacio, who was not directly involved in the neutrality work during the Arias years but went on to serve in the Ministry of the Environment in the years after the pledge, also expressed frustration with the lack of implementation of the Peace with Nature objectives. Specifically, he called Peace with Nature "a lot of discourse, a little action." He saw this not only as detrimental because Costa Rica wasn't meeting its climate goals but also dangerous since without implementation the country could lose the prestige and trust that it has long enjoyed from other nations.

In tandem with these critiques, however, respondents described numerous helpful consequences of the Peace with Nature initiative. For several people—Félix, Humberto, and Pablo—perhaps the best outcome of the Peace with Nature initiative was the development of an association called *Costa Rica por Siempre* (Costa Rica Forever). Costa Rica Forever is a private foundation that established a trust fund, the balance of which is to be used to protect Costa Rica's parks in perpetuity. Pablo described Costa Rica Forever as "doing what the national parks used to do." One of the three main goals of the Peace with Nature initiative was to create a fund to protect the parks. One respondent recalled the late Álvaro Ugalde, former director of the National Parks Department, saying that if he could establish a fund for the parks, he could "die happy."

Pablo explained that once the Crucitas scandal unfolded, he tried to separate the then nascent work around "Costa Rica Forever" from politics as much as he could. This wasn't entirely possible since Minister Dobles who had helped open Las Crucitas to mining was also involved in the fundraising efforts, but, he said, they did what they could to make the association less associated with the president and the minister. The Costa Rica Forever NGO was founded in 2010. While one of the three initial aims of the organization was to establish a trust fund protecting parks, the foundation has since been active in addressing issues in the country's marine areas (Asociación Costa Rica por Siempre n.d.). Those who founded the association

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explained that they used a novel fundraising technique to raise funds from donors around the world. Several major international environmental NGOs contributed to the fundraising efforts, including Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy.

Félix called the association a "major success" of the Arias administration but explained that Arias was not involved in these efforts. However, Arias's presence at the time of the association's founding and the initial fundraising efforts mattered. As he put it, "It's much easier to raise money for Costa Rica" than it is to raise money for other countries, such as Panamá. I asked Pablo, who had collaborated with Félix on the initial work to develop the NGO, whether the association could have come into being without Arias as president. His response was blunt: you definitely "don't have [the association] without Arias." He told me a story about a particular conservation trust in the United States with a leader who had an interest in donating to conservation in Costa Rica. An advisor to President Arias knew the potential donor and was able to arrange a meeting between the donor and Arias. In preparation for this meeting, the advisors discussed how Arias had to actually say to the donor, "We need your support." Once Arias sat down with this donor, said these words, and the donation came through, this donation served as a kind of "motivating force" that helped the association's founders gain additional financial support. This critical donor's respect for Arias and admiration for Álvaro Ugalde were responsible for his willingness to make a donation.

Other interviewees mentioned that a benefit of the neutrality pledge was that it "tied up everything nicely," or connected people and ideas that had been previously disconnected. Humberto specifically mentioned the pledge connecting people, industries, and ideas such as tourism, farmers, Costa Rica wanting to be heard and seen, and third-generation human rights. He added that it did all of this with support from the foreign minister and that the pledge had "something for everyone." For him, the neutrality pledge served as the culmination of everything that had been done under and since the José María Figueres administration, in large part because the pledge relied so strongly on markets. In his view, the government took carbon neutrality to heart and as an expression of human rights. Echoing these points, Gerardo described Peace with Nature as a political vision that gave way to strategy and that supported the PES program. Peace with Nature was a theme that had a "much wider vision" than some of the policies that have been developed

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since the mid-2000s. Although Gerardo was clear to add that the neutrality pledge was imperfect, since it missed the opportunity to improve urban transportation issues in the GMA, it was still helpful for setting out a broad national "vision." Manuel, a biologist, described a similar benefit from the broad vision, or scope, of the neutrality pledge. Carbon neutrality gave Costa Ricans a "general theme" under which they could fit a variety of other environmental concerns since the theme of carbon neutrality encourages lower rates of consumption.

Gerardo described efforts to "tie everything together" as beginning with the 2007 pledge but continuing while the formal climate planning took place in 2010–2011 as they were writing the National Strategy on Climate Change plan and the subsequent Plan of Action to fulfill the aim of the neutrality pledge. In writing the Plan of Action, he and his colleagues had to "take [climate change] out of the environmental agenda and put it in other ministries." They had to make climate change a theme of development, not just an environmental theme. There were two key reasons why the team had to bring the climate agenda to other ministries. First, the MINAE is small in comparison to other ministries in Costa Rica; on its own, it can only accomplish so much. And second, to make progress on their climate goals, they had to connect with relevant people outside of the MINAE. For example, transportation (an important part of neutrality efforts as originally envisioned) is under the Ministry of Transportation. Agriculture and cattle raising are also outside the MINAE. By doing this, he explained, he and his colleagues were eventually able to write Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action plans (NAMAs) for the livestock, coffee, sugarcane, banana, and rice sectors (UNFCCC n.d. Public NAMA, Search Results).[4]

According to some respondents, another benefit of the neutrality commitment was that it created a state of mind or a sensibility around climate change and climate mitigation in Costa Rican society. Some said that because of the neutrality pledge, climate change became a more general topic of discussion and was recognized as an issue that required a political response.

In a 2019 interview with Julieta, an employee at the Climate Change Center, she explained that when it was made, the carbon neutrality goal wasn't "technical" like it was at the time we spoke. But, back then (mid-2000s), the neutrality goal had political support and easy name recognition. This is key—even though Costa Rica did not achieve carbon neutrality, Julieta believed that the pledge was important because the support for the

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pledge and its easy name recognition created a "sensibility" around climate issues for Costa Rican businesses. Lorenzo, Julieta's colleague, said carbon neutrality created a "sensitization"—an awareness, a sensitivity—to climate change issues throughout Costa Rican society. In other words, the pledge made people more aware of the problem of climate change.

The first study using a nationally representative sample to measure Costa Ricans' beliefs and views on climate change relied on data collected in 2009 (Vignola et al. 2013). It showed that the vast majority of respondents (about 85 percent) said they were concerned or very concerned about climate change and nearly all respondents thought climate change was already happening, albeit in locations distant in either time or space. The timing of this study has had the unintended but unfortunate consequence of making it impossible to determine whether the pledge had the kind of impact on public awareness of climate change that Lorenzo described or whether Costa Ricans' high levels of concern and awareness of climate change preceded the founding of the Peace with Nature campaign.

Lorenzo explained that it can be hard to understand the problem of greenhouse gas emissions—they can't be touched, felt, or seen. So, the pledge was helpful because it made climate mitigation more easily comprehensible for people and for businesses. Carbon neutrality educated people—it got people and businesses thinking about climate change, and the pledge "didn't ask for more." Although emissions (not accounting for land use changes; see chapter 1) have increased since the pledge, Lorenzo thought that the benefit of the pledge was that people and businesses were more aware of the climate issue. Moreover, he explained that before the neutrality pledge, climate change was relegated to the technical domains of Costa Rican life—such as in the National Institute of Meteorology (IMN), the organization that has produced the national communication report for the United Nations since 2000 (respondent Sergio; IMN 2023). Once politicians announced the neutrality pledge, climate change became a political issue in Costa Rica, not just a technical one. The beauty of this, he explained, is that now the theme is ubiquitous in society and many different groups of people—advisors, academics, civil society NGOs, scientists, and the president—are working on climate-relevant issues.

Ignacio, a former minister of the environment, was initially critical of Peace with Nature and the carbon neutrality goal. He said that the neutrality pledge "made [him] very mad" because he thought it was irresponsible for

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FIGURE 6.2
A photograph of a bicycle with a sign on it saying "Carbon Neutral." *Source:* Author.

the ministry to make a pledge without data, simulations, or plans to verify that it could achieve the goal. However, when I asked Ignacio how the neutrality pledge affected him when he worked at the MINAE years after the pledge, he had a surprisingly positive way to talk about the pledge's effects. The pledge "created a state of mind"—businesses were talking about it; everyone was talking about it as a national goal.

I said that I had read that about fifty Costa Rican businesses had tracked their carbon dioxide emissions and went through a verification process to sequester remaining emissions, and he was quick to point out that there were more than fifty that had done so, as if it was a point of pride. He added that he "appreciated very much the scenarios of Óscar Arias." In his and his colleagues' work in the MINAE, he said they "held onto the carbon neutrality goal" but added data. In other words, although Ignacio was critical of the largely symbolic nature of the original neutrality pledge, he came to appreciate the pledge for creating a kind of momentum around emission reductions that he was able to capitalize on when he entered the MINAE. As we will see

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in the next chapter, this is a theme that some other respondents mentioned as well when discussing the nationally determined contribution (NDC) plan of 2015 and the 2019 decarbonization pledge.

SUMMARY

Costa Rica enjoyed positive international attention after it announced its pledge to go carbon neutral in front of captive international audiences in 2007. How do the lessons from this book inform our understanding of this commitment, and of this period overall? Several respondents claimed that one of the rationales for Costa Rica's carbon neutrality pledge was that an available international mechanism for countries in the global north to fund emission reduction projects in the global south at this time, the CDM, did not work in Costa Rica. As table 6.2 showed, Costa Rica participated in a number of CDM projects, so this does not entirely account for what happened. What is notable, however, is the sense among some members of the green elite that Costa Rica was too developed—overall, and in its clean electricity grid and forestry program specifically—for the international mechanisms of climate mitigation to work there. There was also a sense, among several interviewees, that Costa Rica needed to push the boundaries, or "do its own thing," when it came to climate mitigation. This perspective, held by some interviewed members of Costa Rica's green elite, reflects a long history of Costa Rica having one of the highest levels of development and the longest pattern of peaceful transitions of political power in Latin America.

Despite this sense of Costa Rican exceptionalism, measures of domestic economic inequality increased during Arias's presidency. While Costa Rica's Gini index was 46.5 in 1996 (the middle of José María Figueres's presidency), it increased to 48.6 in 2008 and reached 50.6 by 2009 (figure 5.1). The start of the Great Recession in the global north in December 2007 (Weinberg 2013) influenced Costa Rica's political economy, with some disastrous effects. Costa Rica's level of unemployment increased from 4.78 to 7.71 between 2008 and 2009. In this context, it is more conceivable why Arias declared mining at Las Crucitas to be "in the public interest." To be clear, this is not to say that removing the ban against open-pit mining was a good thing, but rather that the elite would seem to be able to make a stronger case about the need for a seemingly quick fix during difficult economic times. In moments of economic collapse, extractivisms look especially appealing (Gudynas 2020).

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Tensions between economic (in)equality and development influenced the course of action at this time. On the one hand, Costa Rica charted its own path on climate mitigation, while on the other hand, the political elite made it possible for a transnational corporation to mine gold in the ecologically sensitive zone of Las Crucitas mine. There almost could not be a more radical shift from Arias's first minister of the environment, Álvaro Umaña (1986–1990), a person who was extolled by several respondents for his leadership on environmental issues at a time when such leadership was rare, to his second, Roberto Dobles, former head of RECOPE, and whom two interviewees with civil society experience called "the devil" for his involvement with the Crucitas mine. It is possible that the economic consequences of globalization, felt more acutely during Arias's second term, prompted Arias to select a minister whose expertise related to mining and extraction.

As with the late 1980s and the mid-1990s climate action eras, we once again see members of the unified elite subculture—current and former politicians, biologists, even some members of the business class who saw the benefits of "going green"—come together as members of a green elite during Arias's second presidency. This time, they united as members of the Peace with Nature committee. As multiple interviewees recounted, committee members did not intensely deliberate over which policies to pursue. Instead, there was a level of agreement among members to establish a trust fund for the parks, announce a carbon neutrality pledge, and "green" the transportation sector. Once again, this relates very closely to what Ott says (2000) about how elite dynamics work in small countries; in these contexts, there is a "level of association among elite groups that is historically based, and less likely to be tainted by disagreements over distribution or other issues" (195). Costa Rica has not achieved carbon neutrality. Has the pledge had any kind of enduring, perhaps positive, effect? We will return to this question in the next chapter.

What was Arias's role in the development and consequences of the Peace with Nature coalition in general and the carbon neutrality goal specifically? Interviewees' responses to this question shared a striking degree of similarity. Nearly every respondent who had the relevant experience to comment on the Arias years shared that Arias did not personally prioritize environmental initiatives during his second term. This is a point of distinction from how interviewees, in the prior chapter, described former president José María Figueres. There, respondents spoke about how Figueres brought a historical,

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professional, and personal interest to issues relating to the environment and the climate specifically. With President Arias, people actually emphasized his lack of concern for environmental initiatives. However, interviewees were also in nearly universal agreement that although the climate was not a priority for Arias, his presence mattered significantly for the climate policies that his advisors advanced during his term. In fact, some went so far as to say that, without Arias, climate mitigation policies would not have moved forward during these years.

Félix, an academic and government advisor, grew to strongly oppose Arias after the Crucitas debacle. He accused Arias of being "captured by influence groups" and described him as the kind of person who would "govern and legislate in favor" of those groups. In thinking about Arias's 2006–2010 term, Félix said he had "nothing" environmental about Arias to discuss with me. He criticized Arias's approach to environmental issues but said that one of the most significant outcomes of Arias's second term was the creation of the Costa Rica Forever association described earlier. People in the Arias administration called the association a "major success" of that administration. But, was it really Arias who did this? Answering his own question, he said, most people—if you asked them—would "strongly reject" a yes answer to that question, but Arias's presence mattered. He added, "It's much easier to raise money for Costa Rica than" other places. To clarify, I asked, so Arias mattered, but at a symbolic level, and he said "Exactly." So, in other words, for this person, Arias changed the course of events in 2006–2010 because of his name recognition and reputation.

To Pablo, who had worked alongside Félix for a time, Arias was "key" for carbon neutrality. Again talking about the Costa Rica Forever association as a significant and positive outcome of the Arias years, Pablo said you definitely "don't have [the association] without Arias" because of the credibility Arias gave to the association's initial fundraising efforts. Emilia, a person with extensive on-the-ground experience and contacts in environmental policymaking, agreed that Arias does not have a reputation as a pro-environmental leader. She explained that although she has been involved in years' worth of national-level decisions about climate change for Costa Rica, "no one has ever mentioned him." She allowed that Arias "coined" the term "Peace with Nature" but said he didn't inspire the country to make this pledge.

In the absence of a president with a personal conviction, family ties, or prior experiences related to environmental issues (see discussion about José

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María Figueres in chapter 5), the advisors who were part of Costa Rica's green elite had to be more creative at this time to advance climate policy. Having a president with a transnational influence and reputation (Arias) created a golden opportunity for these advisors. For example, Humberto, who had worked as a top-level climate advisor with the government as far back as the Figueres administration, agreed that the idea of neutrality did not begin with Arias, nor did Arias really push for it. To him, it was really the opposite—a group of people trying to sell it to him. This is what happens when "you don't have a lot of environmental things in your plans." About his work as a top-level advisor, he said, "I think we managed to get Arias to adhere to Peace with Nature and declare Peace with Nature," again making clear that it was the advisors who sold the idea to President Arias. He thought the Peace with Nature initiative was important for the world and added that, while its name was a little trite, it "jived with his theme on peace." He thought Minister Dobles was more passionate about the Peace with Nature initiative.

Nonetheless, Humberto added, "The fact that [Arias] took the banner [on Peace with Nature] shows how deeply rooted the climate agenda was." In other words, the fact that *even Arias*, a president who is not known for advancing environmental issues, supported Peace with Nature reveals how important climate change was at that time. As concern about climate change became institutionalized in a global sense, there was a higher urgency for Costa Ricans to do something about the issue (Hironaka 2014). Finally, he noted that Arias's support for climate issues continued with the support he gave in nominating fellow Costa Rican Christiana Figueres as executive secretary of the UNFCCC. (The nomination of a person to the UNFCCC executive secretary position requires a formal endorsement from the president of the nominee's nation.) Humberto, who had worked with presidents before Arias, explained that climate was not Arias's "cup of tea"; denuclearization and peace were probably still Arias's top concerns. This was in fairly stark contrast to how he described working under Figueres, for example, when, he said, "I definitely had [his] ears" and "Climate change was perceived as relevant."

Luis, an academic who was involved in climate planning work after the pledge announcement, explained that during his second presidency, Arias wanted to "recreate this period of peace" from his first presidency, so he developed the Peace with Nature initiative. A committee of advisors (the green elite) brought the idea of the neutrality pledge to Arias, and "it wasn't difficult to get [Arias] to commit." Luis told me there is a saying: "It doesn't

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matter who is the father, if the son is a strong advocate," which seemed to capture the process well. This sentiment describes the important work of the unified, urban-based green elite in continuing to advance climate mitigation initiatives under a president who did not "take up the banner" himself. We will see a stark contrast between interviewees' descriptions of Arias and President Carlos Alvarado in the next chapter. Several people working at this time explained that Minister Dobles was very active in pushing the carbon neutrality agenda. According to Tatiana, climate change and carbon neutrality were "the top theme" in 2007 and 2008; she attributed this to how much Roberto Dobles prioritized climate issues. As she put it, he was "the great promotor of the theme at the global level."

There is an important point of distinction between Arias's second administration and José María Figueres's. When Figueres was president, the climate agenda and the sense of Costa Rican exceptionalism were not as deeply rooted as they were during the Arias years. In the context of the mid-1990s, Figueres's biographical and professional interest in sustainable development and climate mattered because it helped cement Costa Rica as a leader in climate issues. By the time Arias returned to the presidency, Costa Rica's economy had changed and become more firmly cemented as an ecotourism destination, and climate change was more of a priority for the global community. By the time Arias returned to the presidency, members of Costa Rica's green elite were not only active on domestic issues but had also been active in the global sphere of climate policy. Franz Tattenbach, former director of the NGO FUNDECOR and current minister of the environment (as of September 2023), was elected to serve on the first executive board of the CDM by China and the G77 as a representative of non-Annex I Parties for the 2001–2003 term (IISD 2010; UNFCCC Secretariat 2001).

Arias, more so than Figueres, was in a position where he had to support leadership on the climate agenda. His presence mattered by providing an opportunity for attention-grabbing branding around the "Peace with Nature" theme and by lending credibility to foreigners interested in supporting Costa Rica's environmental initiatives. In a small context like Costa Rica's, a leader with transnational influence and exposure might have an outsized influence. In addition, Arias saw an opportunity to draw a throughline from his second presidency back to his first (and his Nobel Peace Prize) and further back to the enduring legacy of José Figueres Ferrer's creation of the second republic. It is worth remembering that in the months leading up to the 1986

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presidential election, Arias fashioned himself in the style of an old fashioned *Liberacionista*, like José Figueres Ferrer, before adopting neoliberal economic policies while in office (Wilson 1998). There is a similar contradiction during his second presidency. He presented himself to the world as the embodiment of the Central American peace process and led the way on climate mitigation, while he declared ecologically destructive mining at home to be "in the public interest."

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7 RATCHETING UP (2015–2019): COSTA RICA IN THE GLOBAL SPOTLIGHT AND THE PLEDGE TO DECARBONIZE

> This transformation [toward climate neutrality] needs to occur now. I take hope from the fact that I see this transformation already occurring. I see it occurring in finance. I see it occurring in technology. I see it occurring in policy. I see it occurring in political will. So the transformation—*if you want to call it a revolution I am very happy to call it a revolution, I am a daughter of a revolutionary and I feel very comfortable with revolutions*—is a powerful revolution that we have here, and one that has already started (emphasis added).
>
> —Christiana Figueres, October 14, 2015

> Both the carbon neutrality pledge and the decarbonization plan signified "*Sí se puede*" or "Yes we can" to "green development." Both signify that Costa Rica can develop and can do so in harmony with nature.
>
> —Field notes from interview with Andrés, from the forestry sector

In October 2015, UNFCCC executive secretary Christiana Figueres of Costa Rica delivered an engaging speech at a climate summit meeting in Oslo, Norway. An article from *Politico* describing Figueres and her speech was titled "The Climate Revolutionary" (Delcker 2015). Weeks later, and just a few days before the 2015 COP meeting in Paris, *The Guardian* published an article titled: "Christiana Figueres: the woman tasked with saving the world from global warming" (Harvey 2015). In 2018, Carlos Alvarado Quesada, a young and charismatic author and former minister of both human development and social inclusion as well as labor and social security won the Costa Rican presidential election. Costa Rica's support for a leftist politician in 2018 contrasted with a global tilt toward nationalism, seen acutely in the presidency of

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Donald Trump in the United States. At his inauguration, Alvarado called for a plan to "decarbonize" the Costa Rican economy, setting himself apart from his predecessors by pledging his immediate support for ambitious climate action. In 2019, surrounded by other members of Costa Rica's unified elite subculture, including Christiana Figueres, President Alvarado announced the national decarbonization pledge and called it a critical step in Costa Rica's development.

This most contemporary period of climate mitigation ambition stretches from 2015 through 2019, during which time there were highs and lows in Costa Rica's climate policy narrative. The small green elite was consequential during these years, as its members helped nominate Christiana Figueres to the position of UNFCCC executive secretary and wrote both the data-driven 2015 INDC plan and the 2018 decarbonization plan. However, the smallness of the green elite was also a disadvantage. When Christiana moved to the UNFCCC, other members of the green elite who had worked alongside her lost a trusted ally in national work on climate change. During these years (2015–2019), there was a resurgence of political action around climate change, inspired by Christiana's work at the UNFCCC and President Carlos Alvarado's youth and support for environmental issues, and specifically environmental justice issues. Some of the roots of this period of climate action reach to the final days of President Arias's second presidency. It is to those days we now turn.

THE 2009 COPENHAGEN COP MEETING

The COP15 meeting was held in Copenhagen in December 2009. Certain COP meetings garner more international attention than others. Global momentum swelled in the lead-up to the Copenhagen COP because the meeting was "initially established as [sic] deadline for agreeing on a regime to succeed the Kyoto Protocol in 2012" (de Águeda Corneloup and Mol 2014, 282). Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan (2015) add that many international observers saw this meeting "as the last chance to effectively tackle climate change to avoid catastrophic ecological tipping points" (1). Global environmental activists referred to the meeting as "Hopenhagen," reflecting the high stakes and the goal of reaching an ambitious accord.

Unfortunately, those hopes were dashed as no accord was reached. However, Costa Rican activist Christiana Figueres, daughter of José "Don Pepe"

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Figueres and sister of José María Figueres, did catch other delegates' attention in Copenhagen. Several people interviewed for this book described the Copenhagen COP as a failure for the global efforts to abate further warming but a critical event in the process that led to Christiana's appointment to the UNFCCC executive secretary position, and as we will see, a pivotal moment in elevating Costa Rica's climate policies on the global stage.

My interviewee Gerardo, a former MINAE employee, described a scene of himself and several other members of Costa Rica's delegation sitting around at the Copenhagen meeting. He asked Christiana, why don't you run for the position of executive secretary? She didn't say anything at that time, but he saw that she thought about it. He recalled her saying that she believed she wouldn't be selected; she had lived in the United States and for that reason she thought that countries like China and Russia would oppose her nomination. Plus, she knew that she would need the support of the current Costa Rican president, Óscar Arias. In Gerardo's description, although they are both affiliated with the liberal PLN party, she and Arias are "rebels." This comment reflects ideas discussed in earlier chapters about the split in the party between the legacy of José Figueres Ferrer and social welfare policies versus Óscar Arias and his acceptance of neoliberal economic policies. Gerardo went on to say that another member of the delegation, who had worked closely with Óscar Arias in the 1980s, called Arias from Copenhagen, spoke with him about nominating Christiana, then shared with the group that Christiana had Arias's support for the nomination. This memory reflects a key idea from chapter 3. Political mobilization (in this case, securing Arias's support for Christiana's nomination) happened quickly due to the small size and interconnectedness of members of the green elite. Though Arias and the Figueres family have policy differences, all people involved could see that Christiana was a good fit for this position and that having her in this role would elevate Costa Rica's international profile. In other words, the small elite saw reason to cooperate, rather than disagree, over her nomination (Ott 2000).

Another member of the Costa Rican delegation at Copenhagen recalled this process with a striking degree of similarity. William, a former minister of the environment, perceived a "negative environment" at the Copenhagen COP that he attributed in part to the prior secretary (Yvo de Boer) and the failure to move nations closer to an accord. At the meeting, Christiana delivered a presentation that he called *muy linda, muy buena* ("very beautiful, very good") and after seeing the presentation, he said to her, "Christiana, why

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don't you go for the secretary position?" Christiana laughed, but he could see that she was thinking about it. He recalled that later on, she told him that other people at the convention who had seen her presentation also spoke with her about the opportunity. William went to speak with President Arias about the opportunity and recalled that Arias had "enthusiasm" for the idea. Further discussions between the minister of exterior relations Bruno Stagno (who served on the Peace with Nature committee; see table 6.1), Christiana, and President Arias left the president feeling that Christiana's nomination was a good idea and went forward with it. Summing up this moment, William said that a lot of people criticized Copenhagen because the meeting didn't meet people's aspirations for agreeing on a new global climate commitment. But the "main achievement" of Copenhagen was Christiana's appointment.

Two former ministers, William and Tobias, discussed the significance of global COP meetings for tiny Costa Rica. As both explained, the meetings provide an opportunity to highlight Costa Rica's domestic climate policies in front of an international audience. William called Copenhagen a "showcase" for Costa Rica's domestic climate policy initiatives. Tobias added that Costa Rican officials announced the carbon neutrality pledge in Copenhagen, but the meeting was "such a failure" that no one noticed tiny Costa Rica's commitment. He said, "We [the world] needed a miracle agreement," and it didn't happen. Tobias, like William and Gerardo, wanted to nominate Christiana for the position, and like the other respondents, he said that after meetings with Bruno Stagno and President Arias, they moved forward with it. The position of UNFCCC executive secretary is not decided by a vote but rather is an appointment by the secretariat general, and Christiana was appointed in 2010. Tobias summed up this historical moment: the Copenhagen COP was a "disaster for the world but a key diplomatic moment for Costa Rica" because of Christiana's appointment. For the people representing Costa Rica at the annual COP meetings, Christiana's leadership at the UNFCCC was a symbolic representation of the work Costa Rican officials had been developing over the past few decades.

Christiana had held leadership positions in the UNFCCC before 2009 including as a member of Costa Rica's national negotiating team and as a member of the CDM executive board (UNFCCC 2016). She also had extensive background experience in civil society initiatives devoted to sustainable development. Like other members of Costa Rica's green elite, Christiana was

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educated in the global north. She received degrees from Swarthmore College in the United States and the London School of Economics.

Christiana's nomination was featured prominently in some global news outlets, with articles referencing her family's political background in Costa Rica (Associated Press 2010). Christiana was under immediate pressure to improve multilateral cooperation on climate after the failure to reach a global compact at Copenhagen. At the next COP meeting (Cancún 2010), two women from the global south—Christiana Figueres and Patricia Espinosa of México—"led the delicate task of rebuilding trust in the UN process after Copenhagen" (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015, 75). Although there were calls to do away with the executive secretary position after the disappointment at Copenhagen, Christiana and her team intensively studied what went wrong before Copenhagen and rethought how to improve global efforts to limit further warming (Kolbert 2015).

DOMESTIC CLIMATE ISSUES

As Christiana assumed the position of UNFCCC executive secretary in May 2010, elevating Costa Rica's climate profile on the international stage, climate issues in Costa Rica moved to the backseat as domestic political elite dynamics shifted. One of Arias's two vice presidents, Laura Chinchilla, won the 2010 presidential contest. President Chinchilla entered office in May of that year, becoming Costa Rica's first female president. Some saw Laura's victory as a means for Arias to continue his political influence, with several campaign ads depicting Laura as a marionette and Arias pulling the strings behind her (Malkin 2010). This portrayal recalls former President Luis Alberto Monge's reaction to the Supreme Court's constitutional chamber decision to overturn a ban on presidential reelections, ultimately paving the way for Arias to run a second presidential campaign in 2006.

Laura's inauguration took place at *La Sabana*, a sprawling urban park in San José. During the event, she stood near the national stadium, a project funded by the Chinese government, reflecting a new pattern of Chinese-funded development aid throughout Latin America (Edwards and Roberts 2015). Though the project began during Arias's term, it was still partially unfinished at Laura's inauguration. As an observer in the crowd at her inauguration ceremony, I recall noting how President Chinchilla spoke about

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preserving the country's natural resources and keeping the country "green." Despite this initial commitment to environmental issues, there was a sense among interviewees that, as time passed, green initiatives were not a priority during the Chinchilla years. As Pablo, a member of the Peace with Nature committee, put it, all governments since Arias have paid "lip service" to the carbon neutrality initiative. This echoes a point made earlier, that with each passing year and the further institutionalization of climate concern, each president, especially those of the liberal PLN party, must commit to a climate initiative, but only some actually do something to address the problem. Samuel, a former minister of the environment, added that neither Laura nor the subsequent president (Luis Solís) "supported" the carbon neutrality pledge. Unlike her predecessor, Laura was not a part of the transnational political elite before becoming president, as she did not have a global reputation. A former minister of justice, Laura campaigned on strengthening security in Costa Rica to reduce the prevalence of crime (Malkin 2010).

As Arias's term came to a close, the Peace with Nature committee was dissolved, but a new climate change office, the Dirección de Cambio Climático, or the Climate Change Center (DCC), was created to continue domestic initiatives on climate change (Fletcher 2013). This office, overseen by the MINAE, has since been the central office for national, government-led climate initiatives, including carbon neutrality and the decarbonization plan. The office was formed right before Arias left, by an executive decree from January 2010 (Government of Costa Rica 2015, 8). While part of the MINAE, the DCC is an independent office that oversees both national and sectoral climate policies.

My respondents were in agreement that Laura's term was a time when elite dynamics mattered less and when climate issues were less of a priority in domestic politics than they had been in prior years. Although Laura had served on the Peace with Nature committee (see table 6.1), in Pablo's opinion, the Peace with Nature initiative did not "translate" well to her presidency. A problem with Peace with Nature was that it was "too much associated with [Arias] personally." The Peace with Nature initiative was so linked with Arias's reputation and persona that without Arias the initiative lost momentum. Pablo added that someone who had worked on Peace with Nature during the Arias years was supposed to be the "knight in shining armor" who would continue that work during Laura's term; they "thought he'd save the day" was how Pablo put it, but this person couldn't do it alone. This comment

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reveals a potential weakness of a small green elite: policy transfer between administrations can fall through when it relies on one person or a very small group of people.

Former minister Samuel, a person with expertise and experience who could provide a long narrative of climate policy in Costa Rica, thought Laura's years were so inconsequential that he grouped them in with Arias's. Lorenzo, from the Climate Change Center, expressed his frustration with the mitigation policies pursued by the Costa Rican government during the Arias and Chinchilla years: Arias "did nothing," and Laura "did less than that." Another former minister, Ignacio, said that during the Arias years, the government "put the theme of the environment on the bookshelf" and that it did the same thing during Chinchilla's time. Interestingly, however, he "appreciated the scenarios" that were advanced during the Arias years, but he did not have anything similar to say about Laura's term.

While these reasons above speak to the role that Laura had in loosening the focus on climate mitigation during her term, two other interviewees mentioned the importance of understanding how changes in government advisors shifted the political landscape at this time and made the possibility of progress on climate initiatives more difficult. Humberto, who left a role as an advisor in 2010, described this year as one with a loss of "human capital." Between his departure to a position in a think tank in another country and Christiana's nomination to the UNFCCC executive secretary in May 2010, the Costa Rican government lost people with multiple decades' worth of experience with domestic climate policies. Gerardo, his and Christiana's former colleague, reiterated these themes. This again illustrates a vulnerability of the small green elite. Policy development and planning happen because of the connections between people with experience in the field and many years' working together. If the green elite does not expand to incorporate more similarly trained people who can develop connections with each other, it is vulnerable in its potential to develop variations of more policy, as members of the green elite circle in and out of other global positions.

Paulo, another former minister of the environment who had been actively involved with environmental policymaking across several decades, explained that it was much more difficult to make progress on environmental initiatives during Laura's presidency than in earlier decades. He compared "environmental" agendas between the José María Figueres and the Chinchilla

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years. Between 1994 and 1998, the focus was on "terrestrial" environmental issues (e.g., land, forest cover). By Chinchilla's 2010–2014 term, "blue things," meaning marine issues, were added to the environmental agenda. It was more difficult to make progress during the later era because by then what was considered "environmental" had significantly expanded. Progress on environmental initiatives was also made more complicated during the 2010–2014 period by the growth in inequality (see figure 5.1). By this later time, there was a greater divide between rural and urban Costa Ricans: rural communities felt left behind as inequality grew, while the urban population was wealthier and had experienced a shift in their values due to their different economic status that, from Paulo's perspective, made them more difficult to satisfy through policymaking.

2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND SHIFTS IN GLOBAL CLIMATE POLITICS

The victory of a candidate of the Citizens' Action Party (PAC) was a salient event in Costa Rican political history. In 2014, academic Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera won the presidential election. He is the first member of a third party—neither the liberal PLN party nor the right-leaning PUSC party—to win the presidential election since Costa Rica's mid-century civil war. His victory signaled a challenge to the dominance of the PLN and more generally the two-party system.

Solís's victory seems to have confirmed what Wilson (1998) observed in Costa Rica at the end of the twentieth century. Writing about the 1998 presidential election, Wilson (1998, 158) suggested that the unusually high rates of voter abstention and voter dissatisfaction with the electoral process might stem from disillusionment at politicians who propose to advance certain policies, but who, once in office, fail to do so. Wilson added that while political figures from the two main parties would likely continue to earn the majority of the vote in the near-term, their ease of election might decrease. Read now almost as a cautionary tale, Wilson (1998) wrote, "In the long term, though, if the major parties do not change, third parties might increase their share of the vote" (158). This appears to be exactly what happened in 2014, when voters, perhaps frustrated by two successive PLN presidents who did not advance policies that were in line with the PLN's historical social welfare model, elected Luis Solís.

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Not a single interviewee mentioned Luis Solís as a president motivated to move on climate. Lorenzo, who had worked at the DCC, mentioned President Solís in passing, adding that, as president, Luis did not attend the COP meetings but rather sent one of his vice presidents. Samuel, a former minister, added that during Solís's term there was more of a theme of choice between people and the environment. This was in contrast to earlier decades, when issues of sustainability had been less polarizing. Humberto thought that ideologically, Luis and his supporters did not feel comfortable with carbon markets and blamed them for the slow movement on these issues during his term. Interviewees did mention, however, that although Luis himself was not active on the issue of climate change, the minister of the environment that he selected, Dr. Edgar Gutiérrez-Espeleta, a former University of Costa Rica professor, was motivated. Julieta described Edgar as someone who was "more vigorous" with data, which led to different and less symbolic types of policy.

During Luis's term (2014–2018), the global framework for nations' climate commitments changed. Back at the Copenhagen COP meeting in 2009, an unlikely collaboration between the United States and the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) led to the creation of a bottom-up, voluntary framework in which each nation pledged its commitment to reduce emissions (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015). Nearly all state leaders agreed to this voluntary pledge and review framework as part of the Cancún Agreement at the 2011 meeting in Durban. At the Lima COP in 2014, parties agreed to the Lima Call for Climate Action (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015, 93–94). This document set forth that all nations, not just wealthy developed ones, were to submit an Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) plan ahead of the COP21 meeting in Paris in December 2015. INDCs were to include climate mitigation plans but could also include climate adaptation plans (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015, 94).

This global framework set in motion the process for Costa Rican leaders to develop its INDC plan. Reflecting on his observations from this time, Ignacio, a former minister, explained that the ministry wanted to stress two goals with its INDC. The first was raising Costa Rica's level of climate mitigation ambition, and the second was increasing transparency. In this way then, as he saw it, some of the motivations for writing the INDC emerged from the legacy of the Peace with Nature coalition, the carbon neutrality goal, and the Arias years more generally.

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As Ignacio saw it, during the Figueres years, there was enthusiasm about climate initiatives, but these initiatives had turned largely symbolic during the Arias years. The INDC represented an opportunity to build more science into the earlier commitments, including the carbon neutrality pledge. In terms of ambition, Ignacio explained that the green elite at this time, himself included, wanted to see Costa Rica's per capita carbon dioxide emissions drop to less than one ton per capita. During our 2019 interview, we discussed how emissions were more than 1.5 tons per capita and that the country was on track for that rate to increase until 2030, when it would began to decrease. Ignacio hoped Costa Rica would reach the one ton per capita goal by 2050. The last time Costa Rican per capita carbon dioxide emissions were below one metric ton per capita was 1991 (see table 6.3). The ministry used the approach of "backcasting" in the INDC to model that they wanted per capita carbon dioxide emissions at less than one ton per person by 2050. The team working on these calculations originally thought they would achieve the goal of less than one ton per capita emissions by 2100, but in the INDC, they increased that level of ambition to meet the goal by 2050. As he put it, that is how we raised the level of ambition in the INDC. Although I could not get access to them, he explained that the team did a lot of simulations to make those calculations. This is in stark contrast to how people described the early work on carbon neutrality, where the government had no data and did not do simulations to verify if or by what date the country could achieve this goal.

Julieta, who helped write the INDC, also drew a link between the carbon neutrality goal and the INDC. When I asked about the process that culminated in the INDC, she explained how the "political environment of 2008/2009 defined the carbon neutrality goal." Once the neutrality goal was developed, the National Strategy on Climate Change and the subsequent Plan of Action were written (see chapter 5). She called these documents "tools" for climate change that all contributed to the development of the INDC. So, in her telling, even something highly symbolic (the carbon neutrality plan) had positive consequences down the line since it created political pressure for state planners to write the subsequent planning documents. When it came time to write the INDC, those planning documents were helpful to the Costa Rican green elite.

In the INDC, state planners reiterated Costa Rica's goal of reaching carbon neutrality. However, in contrast to earlier documents on carbon neutrality

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(see chapter 5), the INDC specifies that Costa Rica proposes "to achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2021 with total net emissions comparable to total emissions in 2005" (Government of Costa Rica 2015, 3). The use of a baseline year from which future emissions would be reduced is not necessary in a carbon neutrality pledge since these commitments simply refer to the goal of balancing emissions released with emissions sequestered (Levin, Song, and Morgan 2015). A baseline year was not part of the discussion in the early days of the carbon neutrality pledge. For example, in the 2009 National Strategy on Climate Change document, the goal was simply for Costa Rica to be a carbon neutral country by the year 2021 (MINAET 2009). Later in the INDC document, state planners wrote, "Costa Rica's long term goal is challenging because it's looking to accomplish zero net emissions by 2085, with several opportunities to periodically review the national and sector strategies to ensure this long term goal" (Government of Costa Rica 2015, 10). Commenting on the discrepancy between the 2021 and 2085 end dates, Ignacio, a former minister, explained that the MINAE tried to draw a distinction between 2021, where emissions would be carbon neutral compared to 2005 emissions, and 2085, when emissions would be zero net emissions. This distinction between 2021 and 2085 made sense to some, but not all, observers of the INDC. As Gerardo, a former DCC employee put it, the INDC just pushed back the date of achieving carbon neutrality to 2085 and this was not a good move politically. In his opinion, Costa Rica still has credibility, but it is losing a little bit of its "glamour."

THE 2015 PARIS COP MEETING

Meanwhile, in the years leading up to the 2015 Paris COP meeting, Christiana Figueres's family connections to sustainability and low-carbon economies were widely publicized in global media outlets (e.g., Germani 2014). A 2012 article in *The Guardian*, for example, drew parallels between Don Pepe's political revolution and the twenty-first century green revolution that his children were leading (Vidal 2012). José María Figueres, after Christiana's appointment to the UNFCCC executive secretary position, assumed the position of head of the Carbon War Room, a global think tank and NGO founded by Richard Branson and other investors to find low-carbon solutions for business (Carbon War Room 2023). Having the Figueres siblings in these two influential positions—Christiana leading efforts to reduce emissions in the

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public sector, José María in the private sector—represented a continuation of a long tradition of friendly sibling rivalry (Vidal 2012).

The high stakes for Christiana's work ahead of the Paris COP were also widely reported on. For example, science writer Elizabeth Kolbert (2015) wrote in an article for the *New Yorker* that profiled Christiana's efforts ahead of the meeting, "Of all the jobs in the world, Figueres's may possess the very highest ratio of responsibility (preventing global collapse) to authority (practically none)." In other words, the position afforded Christiana no ability to hold countries accountable or push them toward particular policies, yet it involved a significant amount of diplomatic and rhetorical work to "[convince] a hundred and ninety-five countries—many of which rely on selling fossil fuels for their national income and almost all of which depend on burning them for the bulk of their energy—that giving up such fuels is a good idea" (Kolbert 2015). This was all happening in the wake of growing disappointment about the possibilities of global climate cooperation and rising global temperatures.

As referenced in the epigraph of this chapter, in October 2015, Figueres delivered an engaging speech at a climate summit meeting in Oslo. An article from *Politico,* describing Figueres and her speech, was titled "The Climate Revolutionary" (Delcker 2015). In the speech, Figueres drew a connection between the need for countries as seemingly different as Costa Rica and Norway to launch transformations toward climate-neutral futures and her father's revolutionary past:

> Ultimately, both Costa Rica and Norway are committed to climate neutrality. And what that means, my friends, is that we will have to get to the point to restore the ecological balance that we lost many years ago, where we will only emit as much greenhouse gases as the Earth can naturally handle.
>
> We are a long way from that, but that is a shared aspiration, not only of Costa Rica and Norway but of many other countries also. And I hope an increasingly accelerating aspiration, because if there's one thing that we do not have, it's time. This transformation needs to occur now. I take hope from the fact that I see this transformation already occurring. I see it occurring in finance. I see it occurring in technology. I see it occurring in policy. I see it occurring in political will. So the transformation—*if you want to call it a revolution I am very happy to call it a revolution, I am a daughter of a revolutionary and I feel very comfortable with revolutions*—is a powerful revolution that we have here, and one that has already started. (Figueres 2015, 5; emphasis added)

Several of the articles published on Figueres and the process leading up to the Paris COP meeting profiled Christiana's appearance, social interactions,

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and work ethic. In these articles, there are clear parallels between the descriptions of Christiana and those of her father from his time in politics. For example, several articles note the discrepancy between Christiana's small physical stature—a mere five feet—and the energy and focus she brought to the task of corralling nations to reach a climate agreement. Germani (2014) writes, "The tiny diplomat from tiny Costa Rica is the world's top climate policymaker, and she's in a manic, 11th-hour race to span what many believe to be an unbridgeable divide: getting 195 nations to agree by the end of 2015 to begin cutting their carbon emissions or adopting other climate-friendly policies to halt global warming." Similarly, Elizabeth Kolbert (2015) wrote, "Figueres is five feet tall, with short brown hair and strikingly different-colored eyes—one blue and one hazel. In contrast to most diplomats, who cultivate an air of professional reserve, Figueres is emotive to the point of disarming—'a mini-volcano' is how one of her aides described her to me. She laughs frequently—a hearty, ha-ha-ha chortle—and weeps almost as often. 'I walk around with Kleenex,' another aide told me."

Similarities to descriptions of the daughter can be seen in profiles of her father. For example, on meeting José Figueres Ferrer (her future husband) for the first time, Henrietta Boggs (2008) would later describe him in the following way: "He was not tall or handsome or even attractive in the usual sense of the word. He had a strange little half-moon smile that was almost impish and olive skin tanned by the sun, and his English, though fluent, was accented and foreign-sounding. The only thing you noticed were his eyes, startlingly blue in that sunburned face, with black, black eyebrows going up into little peaks. Later I was to learn that his family came from a part of Spain, Catalonia, where his coloring, black curly hair and piercing blue eyes, were not exceptional, but now the combination seemed exotic and strange" (30).

In addition, in the very first paragraph of his political biography of Don Pepe, Charles Ameringer (1978) writes:

> Twice Costa Rica's president and once the head of a junta, he was as active in foreign affairs as in domestic matters. In fact, he believed that the attainment of political democracy, economic development, and social justice in Costa Rica hinged upon those concepts prospering internationally. For this reason he fought the dictators of Central America and the Caribbean in alliance with leaders of Latin America who shared his views. He influenced the shaping of United States policy toward Latin America for a time and participated in international conferences of statesmen and intellectuals throughout the world. *Physically, José Figueres is a small man, but in inter-American politics he has cast a long shadow*. (Emphasis added)

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In addition to these clear parallels between Christiana's and her father's physical appearances, other sources take note of their similar approaches in social interactions and in resolving problems. The two share the unusual ability of communicating and connecting intimately with people from widely varying socioeconomic positions. In Elizabeth Kolbert's (2015) profile, Christiana said, "I have no problem sitting on the floor, sipping hot water from a dirty cup . . . I also have no problem sitting next to Prince Charles." In another profile in the *Christian Science Monitor*, Germani (2014) also discovered Christiana Figueres's ability to connect with people around the world and called this a "humility" that members of the Figueres family share and reflected on Figueres's unusual ability to "shift from power figure to normal citizen."

While Christiana probably did not develop this approach exclusively from her father, there is a clear parallel between her approach to work at the UNFCCC and her father's approach to politics. He also had a reputation for his ability to connect with people unlike himself, sometimes under unusual circumstances. Figueres was exiled from Costa Rica in 1942 after objecting on national radio to the Calderón government's failures and corruption (Ameringer 1978; Wilson 1998). While in exile in El Salvador, the people hosting Figueres and his wife thought it was strange that Figueres greeted both the wealthier hosts and the peasants. Boggs (2008) recalled one host saying to them, "Everybody tells me that Costa Rica is a strange place and if that's the way you treat your peasants, I believe it" (116).

Beyond their shared ability to connect with people from dissimilar social classes, Christiana and her father shared a militant focus, a sharpness, in how they resolve problems. In one memorable passage of her book documenting her time with José Figueres Ferrer, Henrietta Boggs recounted a time when she mentioned to Figueres that she might like to have a fireplace in their home at *La Lucha* farm. He approached the prospect of building a fireplace with a laser focus and an intense determination to complete the project quickly. After she described where she wanted the fireplace, Boggs (2008) recounted the following scene:

> Pepe pulled out the volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica which dealt with fireplaces and buried himself in the article. I, of course, was convinced that the whole project was just a passing fancy. To try to design a fireplace when he'd had no experience with one, and never even lived in a house where one was used, seemed too remote a possibility to take seriously.

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> But the next morning he got up early and disappeared. While I was still at breakfast, there was a thump on the porch, and noises as someone dragged and bumped heavy objects up the steps, and then the door banged open. Pepe, his clothes covered with mud, was helping four men pull and haul a collection of large stones into the living room. They were followed by other men carrying a collection of lumber, tools, nails, saw horses, and sheets of iron plate—along with a generous collection of mud on their heavy shoes. The rain dripped off their clothes and hats making the mud turn into widening puddles on the floor.
>
> Seeing my startled face, Pepe smiled his little gnomish smile and announced his plans.
>
> We shall start right away. We shall have this work finished in three days. And then, according to the encyclopedia, it has to dry for two days. But by this time next week, you will have your fireplace. (79)

Figueres completed the fireplace as intended. Christiana's similarly intense focus is described by Harvey (2015): "Figueres cuts a compact figure, business-like and direct, though with moments of fire. She answers every question immediately, with punch, hard facts and rapid conclusions, and sometimes humour. On the platform of climate talks, she is intense and focused, whatever chaos may be happening around her."

The high expectations ahead of the 2015 Paris COP were at least partially fulfilled. Before the meeting, leaders in 186 nations submitted Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, which described national plans to reduce emissions by 2025 or 2030 (Davenport 2015). The Paris Agreement clarified parties' aims to try and limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The Agreement also called on all nations to submit revised emission reduction plans in 2020 and then every five years after that. Article 4 of the Agreement committed each nation to increasing its climate mitigation ambition in each subsequent nationally determined contribution (United Nations 2015, 4). Once the Agreement entered into force in November 2016, nations' Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) became their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). While the Paris Agreement had its critics, including some highly vulnerable nations who wanted to see further funding allocated for adaptation and those who highlighted how the agreement did not limit warming to 2 degrees C, it was widely seen as a critical step in global efforts to abate further warming (Davenport 2015). Estimates are that the plans nations submitted ahead of the Paris COP need a "boost" of climate mitigation ambition to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius (Rogelj et al. 2016).

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Interviewees had a lot to say about Christiana's work at the UNFCCC. There was agreement that Christiana made a difference at the COP—that *she* mattered for the conference's success and deserved credit. In other words, she mattered in a way that is similar to how respondents described the importance of President Figueres in the mid-1990s or President Arias's presence during the Peace with Nature era.

For some, Christiana's work in the executive secretary role was a symbolic representation of Costa Rica's prior leadership on climate initiatives and a motivator to continuing that climate ambition and leadership going forward. There was widespread agreement that having Christiana at the UNFCCC mattered for Costa Rica, in one way or another. Pablo, who had attended prior COPs for Costa Rica, said that he had seen "failure" at the Copenhagen meeting, but then Christiana took the executive secretary position and "made it happen," referring to the success at the Paris COP. Tobias, a former minister who knew Christiana and her brother José María well, also had something to say about why Christiana's presence mattered. As he put it, "she really takes over." Christiana had been working with the NGO she created—the Centre for Sustainable Development of the Americas—for about a decade before she came to the secretariat. She also had extensive experience working with the UN on climate issues. This background gave her a "very high international profile." She has a lot of contacts, she is tri-lingual (Spanish, English, and German), she "knew how to carry herself," and she has "star quality." He said in summary that she "did an absolutely great, great job."

I asked Robert, a former advisor to the Costa Rican government and former colleague of Christiana, about whether and, if so, how Christiana's background influenced what she was able to do at the UNFCCC. He called the Paris Agreement and Christiana's work there "an expression of Costa Rica's work in a global context" and in front of "a global audience." He called Costa Rica a "natural bridge between industrialized and developing countries" given its high rankings for metrics of development (see chapter 2). As a representative from such a country, Christiana was able to help "find common ground" among nations. Costa Rica "had that role for years," but he made the point that Christiana was the embodiment of Costa Rica's important intermediary position between the global south and the global north. Christiana's (and her father's) ability to communicate and connect with people across the global socioeconomic spectrum exemplifies this point. As for how Christiana mattered for the Paris Agreement, Robert simply said,

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"*She* did it." And she was able to do it because "she collaborates, she listens." "The fact that Christiana was one of the main authors [of the Agreement]," he added, "it's natural."

Christiana remains a part of the transnational political elite. Since stepping down from the UNFCCC in 2016, she has received significant and global recognition for her work. Her website shows the astounding array of awards she has received from governments, civil society, the press, and academic journals (Figueres 2022). Among her honors, Christiana was named one of the five most powerful women in science by BBC Mundo in 2017 (Rodríguez 2017). When interviewed for this article, she was asked when she fell in love with science and nature. She answered by drawing on her family background: "I grew up on *La Lucha* farm, surrounded by *cipreses, cabuya, granadillas, fresas y berros*. As a child, I rode horseback daily with my older brother on the trails of the farm. Nature was my first home, and it is still my favorite home."

Though she has worked on climate change since 1995, nearly all of her awards date from 2015 or later, which reflects her increasing and more transnational reputation and influence. In 2016, *Time Magazine* named Christiana one of the 100 most influential people in the world. There, she and her work were described by Robert Redford, an actor from the United States: "I met Christiana Figueres when I was at the U.N. speaking about the threat of climate change. I've been working on this issue for 40 years, and in this time I've never met anyone quite like Christiana. She is a force of nature—a fierce and gentle fighter who tells it like it is but never wavers in her unrelenting optimism" (Redford 2016). She has earned honorary doctorates from among the most prestigious universities in the world (Figueres 2022). This is another example of the kind of positive recognition that has been given to the members of Costa Rica's green elite who develop a transnational influence. Christiana tweets almost daily about global climate issues, and since 2019, she has cohosted a podcast called "Outrage and Optimism," where she and cohosts talk with global leaders from a variety of sectors about climate change. In the trailer episode from April 2019, Christiana described her outlook on climate: "And finally, remember, impossible is not a fact, it is an attitude, and we are running out of time" (Figueres 2019). In 2020, she coauthored a book outlining possible strategies and outlooks for the future amid global climate change (Figueres and Rivett-Carnac 2020).

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2018 COSTA RICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Back in Costa Rica, Carlos Alvarado Quesada, of the center-left PAC party, won the presidential contest in 2018. At the age of thirty-eight, Alvarado, a minister under former president Luis Solís, became the youngest person elected president in more than a hundred years (Cordoba 2018; Murillo 2018a). The first round of voting for the presidency produced two top candidates for the runoff. One was Carlos Alvarado. The other was an evangelical pastor named Fabricio Alvarado (no familial relation). Fabricio held traditional, conservative viewpoints, such as an opposition to gay marriage (Cordoba 2018).

Some were shocked to see these two candidates as finalists—one from the same party as the prior president (Carlos Alvarado) and the other someone new to politics and with a conservative set of social views (Fabricio Alvarado). Pablo explained that it was surprising to watch Carlos Alvarado rise in prominence since there was a sense that his predecessor (Solís) was a letdown. However, Costa Ricans were learning that Carlos "is his own person." In his opinion, what happened between the first and second rounds of voting was truly shocking. Fabricio's "spiritual father" declared that the patron saint of Costa Rica (*la* Virgen *de los Ángeles*) was a "demon" or an "unclean spirit" (Alvarado 2018). Once this happened, Carlos won the presidential runoff by a landslide.

While Carlos Alvarado is the youngest president of the past century of Costa Rican history, a journalist in Costa Rica notes he really is "the youngest in this country's history" since prior young presidents lived during times when Costa Ricans enjoyed much shorter life expectancies (Murillo 2018a). The life expectancy for Costa Rican men in 2018 was seventy-seven years, so the same could not be said about the new young president (WorldBank 2023b). President Alvarado, born in 1980, represents a generational shift in Costa Rica in terms of his attitude toward more commonly accepted ideas of the day. Murillo (2018a) writes: "The concepts of 'inclusivity' and 'climate change' are ideas he has fully assimilated." As we will see, policy documents crafted during Carlos's presidency represent these ideas. There also appears to be more attention directed to issues of environmental justice during his presidency, compared to prior periods of climate mitigation policymaking in Costa Rica. Julieta, who was active during the Alvarado years, called him young and very committed. Samuel, a former minister, also called him young

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and explained that "environmental themes" were very clear priorities during his campaign.

Unlike Óscar Arias, Carlos Alvarado does not descend from the coffee elite. And unlike the Figueres siblings, he does not come from a political family. Carlos has a degree in journalism from the University of Costa Rica and worked as a journalist and wrote novels before he entered politics. He famously enjoyed a brief stint in a rock band during his university years and considers Ernest Hemingway and Pink Floyd his inspirations (AFP 2018). Although President Alvarado grew up in different circumstances from some of the other political figures in this book, we will see how as president, he saw the advantage of drawing on the legacies of these historical figures.

Alvarado described his movement away from journalism and into politics after seeing a woman harmed by an injustice to her family. As he has described it, this moment made him realize that he could no longer merely document injustices through journalism; instead, he resolved to work through political channels to minimize harm to people (AFP 2018). After his studies at the University of Costa Rica and the University of Sussex in England, he joined the party of then-candidate Luis Solís. He held the positions of both the minister of human development and social inclusion and the minister of labor and social security during Solís's term before mounting his own campaign and winning the 2018 election. Following his presidential term (2018–2022), Alvarado joined the faculty at Tufts University in the United States (Tufts University 2022).

The election of Carlos Alvarado, a candidate with immediate support for ambitious climate action and initiatives like gay marriage, over the extremely socially conservative Fabricio Alvarado caught international headlines. In the midst of the worldwide trend that brought the radical and populist President Trump to power in the United States, Costa Rica, to some international observers, was a notable exception (Stiglitz 2018).

Alvarado made the issue of decarbonizing the Costa Rican economy a central issue on the first day of his presidency. He and his wife Claudia Dobles arrived at the inauguration ceremony "on Central America's first hydrogen-fueled bus, which was escorted by a team of cyclists" (*Tico Times* 2018). In his inaugural address, Alvarado spoke about the importance of decarbonization: "Decarbonization is the greatest mission of our generation, and Costa Rica must be among the first countries of the world to achieve it, if not the

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first" (Government of Costa Rica 2018, 3). The decarbonization plan also discusses the importance of Costa Rica becoming a decarbonization "laboratory" where ideas can be tested and improved before being applied elsewhere (Government of Costa Rica 2018, 3); language about Costa Rica being a "laboratory" has deep historical roots (Boza, Jukofsky, and Wille 1995; Fletcher, Dowd-Uribe, and Aistara 2020) and is familiar from earlier chapters (1, 5, 6, and 7).

Alvarado's new administration also received international attention for its commitment to representation and inclusivity. With her appointment, Vice President Epsy Campbell became the first woman of African descent to serve as a vice president in Latin America (*Tico Times* 2018). Women outnumbered men as ministers in the new cabinet. However, Alvarado selected Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, noted conservationist and lawyer, as his minister of the environment. Rodríguez had held a variety of domestic and international positions related to the environment, including minister of the environment. He is a member of the green elite.

In discussing the relative importance of each president and minister to the climate agenda, Julieta explained that each minister or president "has a vision." For the president (Alvarado) and minister in 2019 (Carlos Manuel Rodríguez) the themes of climate change and science-based policy were very important. The fact that the president and minister highly value these issues made work in the MINAE and the DCC easier. As she put it, "there is an opportunity" and "We have to go for it while we have the opportunity." Samuel, a former minister, added that "environmental themes" were very clear priorities to Alvarado during the campaign.

THE DECARBONIZATION PLAN

Following his inaugural address, interviewees recalled that Alvarado quickly turned his enthusiasm for decarbonization into a more specific request. Julieta recalled that, after the inauguration, President Alvarado said, "I want the decarbonization plan in 90 days." Samuel thought it was one hundred days. Whether ninety or one hundred days, President Alvarado made the plan a priority by requiring such a short turnaround time for the document. Julieta added that a motivation for writing the decarbonization plan so quickly was so that it could inform the National Plan of Development, which it did (MIDEPLAN 2019). According to Samuel, the group that had

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been working on the plan at the MINAE and the DCC office had a "first draft" of the decarbonization plan by August 2018, three months after the inauguration.

There was some confusion in global media outlets about the president's call to decarbonize the Costa Rican economy. In the days following Alvarado's inaugural speech, which included his pledge to decarbonize the Costa Rican economy, some media reported that Costa Rica had enacted a plan to ban the use of fossil fuels (Embury-Dennis 2018; Sánchez, Sepehr, and McCarthy 2018). However, as Irfan (2018) reported in July 2018, Costa Rican officials were not at that time considering a ban on fossil fuels. Félix, an academic and advisor to government in 2019 asked me to imagine what would happen if fossil fuels were banned: "The country would fall apart." The guy on his bike going to the store would be fine, but the rest of the country would be done. "You can't do it [ban fossil fuels] in one day." The idea of permanently banning the future extraction of fossil fuels did, however, surface in 2021. We will revisit this later on.

Julieta and Samuel explained that the Alvarado administration had intended to share the decarbonization plan publicly in November or December 2018 but decided against doing so because in September 2018 (one month after the first draft had been prepared), public sector employees went on strike against a series of reforms proposed by the Alvarado government. Initially, these were the largest strikes in nearly two decades (Murillo 2018b). The Alvarado reforms, centered on cutting benefits to public workers, were reportedly made to address Costa Rica's debt (Cuffe 2021). Public workers, largely teachers and hospital staff, overwhelmed the streets. In December, "the Congress approved the new fiscal plan after undergoing several reviews by the top courts" (Lobo 2018). Public workers also accused trade unions of acquiescing to the government and giving up on strikes too quickly. By December, the nearly three-month-long strikes had ended. The strikes reportedly began to gain international attention when tourism cancellations increased by mid-September (Murillo 2018b).

These strikes highlight a frequent theme in this book: rising levels of domestic economic stress periodically caused Costa Ricans' much distress.

A 2013 article from the *Tico Times*, an English-language newspaper in Costa Rica, noted that Costa Rica's rate of inequality was rising faster than that of other Latin American nations. While overall improvements in quality of life had occurred for Costa Ricans between 2001 and 2011, this report

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found concerning levels of income inequality on the rise. How Costa Rica will pay to decarbonize its economy remains unclear; initial reports estimated a cost of $6.5 billion dollars to cover the first eleven years of the phasedown off fossil fuels (Sengupta and Villegas 2019).

In March 2019, days after officially launching the decarbonization plan in downtown San José, President Alvarado said the following about decarbonization during a visit to Stanford University: "It's the right thing to do, and we must all do it" (Salinas 2019). While the circumstances are not identical, President Alvarado's trip to California to announce his country's decarbonization commitment recalls Minister Dobles's 2007 speech at the UNEP governing council meeting where he discussed Costa Rica's Peace with Nature commitment. In both instances, members of Costa Rica's green elite used an international forum to immediately share the news about Costa Rica's climate policies as a way to build momentum and positive international attention for their initiatives.

In an opinion piece published in the *Financial Times* on March 17, 2019, President Alvarado wove the decarbonization commitment into Costa Rica's long line of exceptional undertakings, such as the abolition of the army (Alvarado 2019). Notably absent from the historical narrative Alvarado described in this article was Costa Rica's commitment to peace and President Arias's Nobel Peace Prize, likely because Óscar Arias had been accused of sexual assault by several women just days before. In the article, Alvarado (2019) said the following: "Other countries must make similar decisions now if they are to set themselves on a path for clean growth. *Our plan is a template that others can follow*, and we are ready to share our experience" (emphasis added).

The plan outlines the Costa Rican strategy to decarbonize the Costa Rican economy with efforts beginning in 2018 and ending in 2050. The plan describes the country's four major sources of emissions: (1) energy (mostly from the burning of fuels for transportation and the electricity system), (2) industry, (3) waste, and (4) agriculture, forestry, and other land uses (Government of Costa Rica 2018, 11–16). The plan then discusses ten "decarbonization axes" that are spread across these four emission sources. For example, one goal under the energy source of emissions emphasizes the need for more public transportation options while another emphasizes the need for more private and public use of electric vehicles.

A news article reported that the first goal—overhauling the transportation system—was a priority for first lady Claudia Dobles (Sengupta and

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Villegas 2019), though interviewees did not mention her as being involved in shaping the decarbonization plan. As of 2020, Costa Rica had Latin America's third highest rate of car ownership (Timperley 2020). Authors of the plan wrote that the transformational goal of decarbonizing the economy would be achieved in about three decades' time, via three stages: foundations (2018–2022), inflection (2023–2030), and normalization of the change, or mass deployment (2031–2050). There are goals outlined for each of the ten "decarbonization axes" over the course of the three time periods. The one thing this plan could count on was President Alvarado's continued support for these themes until 2022, when his time in office ended. After that, the time periods are broader, in part at least because the leadership from future periods was unknowable.

The plan also outlines what it calls eight "cross-cutting strategies to catalyze change." These strategies link the decarbonization plan with structural issues in Costa Rica in a way that prior documents, such as the national strategy for climate change, produced after the carbon neutrality pledge, did not. One cross-cutting strategy emphasizes the need for new and revised institutional structures, including RECOPE, the Costa Rican Petroleum Refinery. Another point emphasizes the need for green tax reform. Currently, the government makes money from a tax on gasoline, and a portion of that is funneled into the Payments for Environmental Services (PES) program. This point states: "New revenue sources should be identified to replace gasoline and automobile sales, and this should be done with a focus on taxing negative externalities, such as air pollution" (Government of Costa Rica 2018, 65). A Costa Rican future that is less dependent on gasoline-powered cars would use less gasoline, providing lower tax revenues to support the PES program, a fact that came into stark relief during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

One other cross-cutting strategy in the decarbonization plan is noteworthy. This strategy emphasizes the need for "inclusion, human rights and promotion of gender equality." The plan states the following: "The decarbonization of the economy will generate opportunities and challenges that will potentially affect the most vulnerable groups differently, and for this reason, national policies, programs and projects with differentiated approaches and disaggregated indicators should be designed to measure the participation and the impact on these groups. Likewise, women, youth, Indigenous peoples and other groups can play a key role as change actors in specific processes"

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(Government of Costa Rica 2018, 67). In other words, the plan recognizes the environmental justice consequences of decarbonization. This is a noteworthy addition since the plans written after the carbon neutrality pledge announcement did not recognize the different impacts of mitigation planning on diverse groups, nor did they call for the participation of marginalized groups in future actions. The devotion to equity in this plan likely comes from renewed global attention to issues of environmental justice and to the generational shift in Costa Rica, embodied by Carlos Alvarado.

REACTIONS TO THE DECARBONIZATION PLAN

Respondents expressed a range of reactions to the decarbonization plan. Many were excited and were generally supportive of the plan's major ideas. Félix, who at the time of the interview served as an advisor to the DCC, explained that the decarbonization plan is about more than decarbonizing—it's also about development. All countries will "have to" decarbonize, and there were three reasons why Costa Rica wanted to do it "ahead of the curve." First, countries that decarbonize first will be able to get away from locking into old polluting technologies faster. Second, decarbonizing early will attract interest from people abroad who will see Costa Rica as a "decarbonization lab." Third, addressing climate change in Costa Rica also meant attending to local, "brown" environmental issues like pollution. Most environmental problems in Costa Rica are from pollutants to air and water—the air is very polluted with particulates, and the rivers are very polluted with trash. So, moving first to be a decarbonization lab not only had the benefits of raising Costa Rica's profile of altruistic environmental actions (Rudel 2014) but would also address local environmental issues that affect air and water.

Félix added that, whether you call the plan "how we move people" or decarbonization, the end result is the same. The "co-benefits are so perfectly aligned." In Costa Rica, the problem is not about increasing sources of renewable electricity. Instead, the issue for Costa Rica is transportation, and this plan allows Costa Rica to improve transport issues. The plan also aims to improve local issues related to air and garbage, and although "the world starts listening when we call it decarbonization," we truly need to "do it for ourselves." He considers the plan doable, but he noted that it will depend not on minor institutional actions but rather on changes that are "transformative."

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Emilia, who did not contribute to the plan but was familiar with it, echoed some of Félix's ideas, specifically about how decarbonization efforts matter for Costa Rica and Costa Ricans: "We're doing it to save us." To her, the plan takes Costa Rica's work on climate change "to a new level" and is "what every country should be doing."

As quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Andrés, an interviewee from the forestry sector, also expressed optimism about the decarbonization plan. To him, both the carbon neutrality pledge and the decarbonization plan signified "*Sí se puede*" or "Yes we can" to "green development." Both signified that Costa Rica can develop and can do so in harmony with nature. He believed that it was possible to get to a point where Costa Rica's emissions are equivalent to what it is able to sequester and was gratified that, with these plans, Costa Rica is showing what it has been able to do to the rest of the world.

Julieta explained that the decarbonization plan emerged from the NDC but that the new plan is the nation's "long term strategy." In their INDC, planners said they would meet their goals by 2100 but in the decarbonization plan, they aim to meet that goal by 2050. So, they are trying to increase ambition over time. When I asked her what makes Costa Rica able to write an NDC that is consistent with limiting warming to 2 degrees C (only a handful of nations have done so), she said plainly, "I don't think there is another way." The work today on climate change, compared to the carbon neutral years, is much more sophisticated. While the country is developing some "threats," it still has strengths, such as the forestry system and the clean electricity grid. As she put it, "*¡Vamos!*" or "Let's go!" capturing both the forward movement of planners and the energy and enthusiasm of those involved with climate mitigation planning.

While some respondents offered these generally positive reflections about decarbonization, others had more critical things to say about the details of the plan. One major point of criticism was the plan's aim of increasing the use of private electric vehicles. Gerardo, who had contributed to earlier climate plans but did not work on the decarbonization plan, was quite dismissive of what he saw as an insufficient next step in Costa Rica's history of climate mitigation planning. After discussing some of the earlier years in Costa Rica's history of climate mitigation, stretching back to the 1990s, he called the decarbonization plan "very weak." To him, the plan put all of the

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emphasis on electric transportation, whereas "the solution has to be reduce cars" and energy usage. Instead, there is a lot of focus on electrifying individual transit. He wished that instead there were efforts to electrify collective transit (electric trains and buses). While the plan treats trains as a "pillar" of reducing emissions from transportation, the "reality of Costa Rica says something different." Projects develop very slowly and take years, sometimes decades, to come to fruition, reflecting the challenges of development in the global south. As for the state of Costa Rica's stance on climate change: "We're not on a good path," because emissions are rising in sectors such as agriculture, cattle ranching, and transportation. It was his strong belief that Costa Rica would not meet the goals it set out for itself in the NDC.

Gerardo pointed out some specific issues with electric vehicles. There are no taxes[1] on electric vehicles, and these cars are not subject to the driving restrictions[2] that apply to gas-powered vehicles in San José (Lara S. 2019)."*Casi te regalan*," or the government basically "tried to give" electric cars away he said, thus failing to mitigate traffic congestion in the urban GMA and disincentivizing investments in collective transit.

Gerardo attributed some of these miscalculations in mitigation responses to the lack of "clarity" at the MINAE. As he put it, people who are working on these issues have good intentions, but they are looking at the problem of climate change horizontally. They are not looking at it from above, and that is what is needed. The people "with vision" aren't there, and when a person looks at a problem horizontally, he can only see fifty meters in front of him. Policymakers need to lift their heads up, as he put it, look out from above and have a broader vision to see further out in terms of the inclusiveness and consequences of climate mitigation planning. He contrasted the narrower decarbonization plan with the Peace with Nature effort which, though not perfect since it missed many transportation issues, had a "much wider vision." To him this talk about decarbonization is "blah, blah, blah" with emission reduction goals that were set off in very distant time frames (e.g., 2030 or 2050).

Pablo, who was not involved with the decarbonization plan but who was involved with earlier climate mitigation policy efforts, also lamented the decarbonization plan's focus on private electric vehicles. He believed that the decarbonization plan would have been better by including more "public transit." He asked me rhetorically, how do other cities do this? They have electric metros, and he cited Rio de Janeiro and New York City as examples.

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Pablo described another knot in the complex problem of getting Costa Rican transport off fossil fuels and onto electricity. He noted the "catch 22 situation" that Costa Rica is in, since it is "locked in" to relying on fossil fuels. As both he and Félix, another academic, explained, taxes on gasoline and cars provide a significant source of revenue for Costa Rica, creating what Pablo deemed an "internal problem," a problem generated by the 1990s law that put a tax on liquid fossil fuels and allocated a portion of those tax dollars to FONAFIFO, the fund that provides payments for people who keep their land forested.

As discussed earlier, there was some confusion in global media outlets following Costa Rica's decarbonization pledge, with some incorrectly reporting that Costa Rica had banned fossil fuels. This is not what the decarbonization plan set out to do. These fuels are critical to the transportation system, which would grind to a halt without them. Félix was thinking about the challenge of relying on fossil fuel taxes in a future where fewer of those fuels will be used when I interviewed him in 2019, and he explained that Costa Rica had time to plan around this issue. In his opinion, Costa Rica had to figure out how to deal with decreasing revenue from fossil fuels, but it had "thirty years" to do so. Some people are worrying about this now, which he called the equivalent of "worrying about what will happen to your hair ten years after you die." He suggested that policymakers reflect on how much they've done and discovered over the past thirty years and remain open and adaptive, acknowledging that the necessary money would probably come from somewhere.

Interestingly, the conditions created as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic provided a window into what this future will look like much sooner than Félix anticipated. With travel and work restrictions in place during 2020, fossil fuel usage in Costa Rica dropped precipitously and along with it, the revenue from fossil fuel taxes to support FONAFIFO. Field notes from my interview with Andrés, a staff member at FONAFIFO, and news reports (Rodriguez 2020) both reveal the problems that the diminished use of gasoline had on FONAFIFO, and by extension the PES program. Andrés explained that in light of diminished funds from gasoline sales, FONAFIFO had to make a change for 2021 whereby it would only honor existing contracts, meaning contracts it had established before the pandemic. They couldn't take on "new hectares" at this time. But, he added, there were also new funds, new sources of money available for FONAFIFO. Funds from the World Bank and

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the Green Climate Fund had helped support FONAFIFO, as had a domestic market for carbon, wherein other businesses buy verified tons of carbon from FONAFIFO. Thinking about a future in which Costa Rica relies less on fossil fuels to power its economy and transportation and more on renewable sources of electricity, Andrés said, "We will suffer," but these other global sources of finance remain helpful; we have to be "dynamic."

Humberto, who had held a leadership position with earlier climate policies, was also quite critical of the decarbonization plan. Although he admitted that all he knows about the plan is what he's seen about it in the newspapers and that he doesn't have much of an opinion so far, he described what he saw as some significant shortcomings of the plan. Speaking in 2019, he said that Costa Rica had local projects, not national climate mitigation efforts. When I asked him about the decarbonization efforts, which seemed like an easily identifiable national climate mitigation effort, his view was that the plan is "not involved in the major economic activity of the country." Climate reduction projects are "not being picked up by the major economic activities of the country." The plan seemed to be "very sector oriented and not emissions oriented," adding that it is "long term, very long term and it is based on carbon neutrality again as an umbrella." Although he emphasized that he doesn't have much of an opinion so far, he confidently declared, "The plan has not been shared with the private sector. The agricultural sector has not been approached, industry has not been approached." The plan is "dealing with emissions from households. That's a hard thing to try and control."

Tobias, a former minister of the environment, expressed a concern that things got "watered down" as policymakers switched away from language about carbon neutrality and toward a focus on decarbonization. But he retained some hope about the consequences of the decarbonization plan, which still focuses on "key things" like how to change transportation and agriculture.

SUMMARY

What lessons can we take away from this section? Frustrations with the Costa Rican status quo were mounting during this most recent period of climate action and were manifest in national political outcomes. The election of the first third-party candidate in 2014, the nomination of Fabricio Alvarado—a political outsider with no governing experience—to the final

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round of presidential elections in 2018, and the massive labor strikes of 2018 all symbolize growing dissatisfaction with the political-economic business as usual in Costa Rica. Using one estimate from Frederick Solt's SWIID database (see figure 5.1), we see that the Gini index had increased by between two and three points from the José María Figueres years to the Carlos Alvarado years. Growing income inequality, as well as a more diversified environmental agenda, complicated climate policy for the green elite at this time.

This era begins with the nomination of Christiana Figueres to the position of executive secretary of the UNFCCC in 2010. In this moment, Christiana, a dedicated member of the unified elite subculture in Costa Rica and a longtime environmental civil society advocate, vaulted onto the most visible global stage for climate change.

Only some of the people interviewed for this book could comment on the importance of Ms. Figueres for Costa Rica's climate mitigation policy narrative since some of the interviews took place before the 2015 Paris COP. However, for people who could comment on this topic, there was agreement that Christiana did not help in a direct way with Costa Rican climate policies, but that her work indirectly supported Costa Rican planners' objectives and that her work at the UNFCCC was a symbolic victory for the nation of Costa Rica. Samuel, a former minister of the environment, called Christiana an "ally." Robert, who had worked with Christiana during her brother's presidency, called Costa Rica a "natural bridge between industrialized and developing countries" and saw Christiana as the embodiment of that bridge.

When I asked Robert what it was like to work with Christiana during her brother's presidency, he said that she is "extremely like her brother, a charismatic speaker and thinker." He added that she's also a "very hard worker, in terms of policy and in getting things done" and that she would get things done "almost in a militaristic" way. This description of Christiana sounds strikingly similar to the way José Figueres Ferrer's first wife, Henrietta Boggs, described him. He went on to add that Christiana would say things like "This will get done by this date." Overall, Robert's comments drawn from working closely with her in the 1990s and his impressions of her work at the UNFCCC clearly indicate that her presence mattered for creating change at both of these historical moments and show the ways in which her behaviors and approach to solving problems are a reflection of her family upbringing.

My respondents were in agreement that while Christiana did not provide technical support to the Costa Rican team working on the country's INDC or

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its decarbonization plan, she played an important symbolic role in motivating enthusiasm and ambition from the Costa Rican delegation. Although Christiana was the executive secretary at the UNFCCC when nations submitted their INDC plans, Christiana did not provide input into the Costa Rican INDC. In fact, Ignacio described the relationship between the MINAE and Christiana at the UNFCCC as "minimal or null" in the months preceding the Paris COP. However, as two former ministers put it (Ignacio and Samuel), Christiana was "familiar" with Costa Rica's INDC when state leaders submitted it to the secretariat.

However, just because there was not a lot of interaction between domestic planners and Christiana at the UNFCCC does not also imply that Christiana's leadership position didn't influence what happened in Costa Rica. As Ignacio put it, Christiana's position was a "motivator" for Costa Rica to maintain its position of ambition and leadership that it had achieved in years prior, citing as far back as the 1997 Kyoto meeting. So, from the perspective of the Costa Rican delegation, having Christiana in that leadership position provided a symbolic reminder of Costa Rica's trajectory of ambition in the global climate policy realm and a motivation to do more going forward. Samuel, who had more to say about how Christiana's work at the UNFCCC influenced the decarbonization plan, explained that it was important to have Christiana in her leadership role at the UNFCCC "not for [Costa Rica's decarbonization] plan" but because she "has been the most important leader for Costa Rica, and for the world" on climate change.

William, a former minister who had represented Costa Rica at the Copenhagen COP and was part of the process of getting Christiana nominated to the executive secretary position, added that it was significant to have someone from Central America in the chief UNFCCC position. When I asked him how her background might have influenced the work she did at the UNFCCC, he said she is "a leader on her own." After having a minute to think, he added that she is part of a country that abolished its army and recognized the right of women to vote: "She had a lot to show to the world." Costa Rica had done a lot of good things. So he emphasized that it was important, symbolically, to have a Central American in the leadership position and that in that role she mattered because she could prominently display, in front of a global audience, what Costa Rican leaders have been able to achieve by incorporating the middle class, as we saw in chapter 3.

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In reflecting on her legacy, former minister Tobias mentioned how Christiana—different from the other transnational political elites profiled in this book—has always been more focused on global climate politics rather than domestic climate politics. When carbon neutrality became an important theme in Costa Rica, Christiana remained "very focused on the convention." To further convey her long commitment to global climate politics, Tobias recalled that Christiana had attended the first COP in Berlin with him, and that she since had gone to every other COP meeting, except a recent one after her time as executive secretary ended. As he put it, "She was *the* person for the convention."

To further convey how Christiana had been more focused on global, rather than domestic, climate politics in the years leading up to her leadership position at the UNFCCC, Tobias added that Christiana was "not so much a part of carbon neutrality." As he put it, she was more in the "questioning side" for carbon neutrality, wondering how Costa Rica could make this work, and at the time of the neutrality commitment was serving on the Executive Board of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Although Christiana was not personally involved with domestic work on neutrality, at the time of her nomination to the UNFCCC executive secretary position, some international observers connected Costa Rica's pursuit of carbon neutrality with their excitement about what Christiana would do at the UNFCCC. For example, in May 2010, after Christiana's nomination was announced, Wendel Trio, the Greenpeace International climate policy coordinator said, "Christiana Figueres has been lead negotiator for a country that aims to become carbon-neutral by 2021, the type of attitude we need on the global stage. We hope she can really engage all countries in a fast-moving dialogue to get agreement on a global deal that will save the world from dangerous climate change" (Associated Press 2010). Gerardo added that Christiana did not bring Costa Rica any advantage when she was executive secretary, but symbolically her work was important. In his opinion, she helped amplify the important Costa Rican themes of neutrality and reforestation at the global level.

Humberto, a former colleague of Christiana, who had worked closely with her before she left Costa Rica for the secretariat in 2010, provided a bit more critical view of the effects that her departure had on domestic climate work in Costa Rica. He explained that when she left for the UNFCCC, he also left the country to work at a major think tank. He said it might sound self-serving, but

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their departures signified a "loss of human capital" for the country. Not only was she a big loss to Costa Rican work but also "no one took advantage of it," meaning that Costa Rican climate planners did not seize the opportunity of having her in the UN secretariat position—a position with extraordinary visibility and responsibility. In Humberto's mind, in Costa Rica, people believe that if you have friends in high places, you should be able to implement things more easily. In other words, because of her position, there should have been a better connection between Costa Rican domestic work on climate and the UNFCCC leadership team, and better information flow. But instead, having her in that position was, for Costa Rica, "an opportunity missed." He added, however, that during the early years of Christiana's work at the UNFCCC, both President Chinchilla and she pushed to include forests in climate negotiations.

While the opening part of this chapter revealed one of the strengths of the small green elite—a small group whose members clustered around each other at the Copenhagen COP, having the thought to nominate Christiana, calling Óscar Arias and getting his support for it—Humberto's perspective highlights a key vulnerability, or drawback, of the small green elite—namely that it is small. With a lot of human capital built up in a small number of people, from Humberto's perspective, a lot was lost when he and Christiana left. Other people from the relatively unified, urban elite subculture did fill their roles, but there was still a resetting that had to be done as members of the green elite cycled out of domestic leadership positions.

The president and the minister of the environment also helped move the needle on domestic climate mitigation policies at this time. According to Julieta from the DCC, each minister and president "has a vision." For President Alvarado and Minister Gutiérrez-Espeleta, this vision was very important. The president's and the minister's support and enthusiasm facilitated the MINAE's and the DCC's abilities to make climate change and emissions cuts a central theme for top politicians. "There is an opportunity," and she and her team had to "go for it while we have the opportunity."

Félix explained that Carlos Alvarado mattered for the plan because he is not from a lobby. He is not from a wealthy family. Leaders matter because they can "set the basis for what's going to happen." While talking with Humberto, who was quite critical of the decarbonization plan, I mentioned that my students in the United States were excited about Costa Rica's decarbonization plan and were writing papers on it. He explained this enthusiasm was

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a result of the plan being serious and of it being led by the president, both of which are important.

Costa Rica is today one of a small handful of nations whose policies are in line with limiting warming to 2 degrees C, and where planners are actively working to align their policies with the more ambitious goal of a 1.5 degree C increase. However, directly underneath the surface—in Costa Rican society at large—is a growing and palpable level of frustration from rising levels of economic inequality and macroeconomic issues. More members of Costa Rican society who feel excluded from the relatively unified elite subculture are voicing their frustrations. The consequences of this are discussed more in the final chapter.

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8 CONCLUSION: AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE FOR COSTA RICA AND FOR THE WORLD

> "If we can't pull [decarbonization] off by 2050, it's likely no other country can pull it off," said Francisco Alpízar, an economist at the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center in Turrialba, Costa Rica, and a climate adviser to the government. "That would be really bad."
>
> —Sengupta and Villegas 2019

In April 2022, Costa Ricans headed to the polls for a presidential election. Like every presidential election in Costa Rica since the end of the civil war, this election culminated in the May 2022 peaceful transfer of power between the incumbent (Carlos Alvarado) and the newly elected president. For those familiar with Costa Rican history as Latin America's longest stable democracy, this was not surprising. What was unexpected were the results of the election. Voters decisively elected Rodrigo Chaves Robles over former president José María Figueres. Chaves is a former World Bank economist who was accused of sexual harassment while working at the bank (Rojas 2022). Chaves has a confrontational style in his approach to the media and has spoken against the need for COVID-19 vaccines and certain restrictions. Chaves has been compared to authoritarian and combative leaders like US president Donald Trump and Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro.

While the Chaves presidency marks a kind of political eruption, social inequality is also on the rise. Reuters (Jorgic 2022) reports that nearly a quarter (23 percent) of Costa Rica's population lives in poverty and that the Gini index in Costa Rica has increased over time (see figure 5.1). Civilians have seen recent cases of corruption, with construction and government officials

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accused of taking bribes. Debt is on the rise. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Alvarado accepted support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The authors of the Reuters report also notice that "The public debt/GDP ratio is the highest in Central America, at 70.3%" (Jorgic 2022).

Rising social inequality has been accompanied by a dramatic surge in violence. Costa Rica, known regionally and globally for peace, historically "the convenience store with its lights on" in a dark neighborhood, as Robert, an advisor to government in the 1990s, put it, is now a more dangerous place for locals and international visitors alike. A news report from April 2023 notes that in 2022, there were more than 650 homicides, more since as far back as 1990, and this figure has been on the rise for fifteen years (O'Neill 2023). In 2022, the murders were concentrated in and around the city of Puerto Limón, along Costa Rica's Atlantic coast (see figure 2.1), a region home to people historically marginalized from mainstream, urban Costa Rican life (see chapter 3). In analyses of the murders, investigators have determined that the vast majority of the killings are "believed to be 'score settling' for grievances tied to the drug market" (O'Neill 2023). Violence increased as job opportunities were taken away. The same news report explains: "The violence has largely affected young unemployed men who turned to the drug trade after 7,000 port jobs were lost in a 2018 privatization foreign contract." Rising inequality creates additional problems, including rising economic hardship, strife, and violence. Homicides continued to rise in the first few months of 2023, and the *Tico Times* (2023) called for more opportunities for education and employment to stem the tide of drug violence. As of this writing, violence has started to move into the central valley, more directly influencing people living in and near San José (Córdoba 2023). Since Costa Rica's stability and safety have been major draws for international tourists visiting the country (Braun et al. 2015), the potential future economic losses from a continuation or scaling up of this violence could have tremendous economic impacts on the small country.

What about environmental issues? A recent analysis reveals that all is not well in this domain either. Pearce (2023) discusses how challenges over land tenure between Indigenous groups and other land-seeking Costa Ricans have exploded in recent years. Indigenous groups, long marginalized by mainstream Costa Rican society, want their land back. Conflicts over land rights have resulted in the recent deaths of two Indigenous activists. Although the government passed the Indigenous Law in 1977 to return seized Indigenous

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lands to their rightful owners, little progress has been made to fulfill its aims (Pearce 2023; IWGIA n.d.). Today, eight Indigenous groups live in Costa Rica, making up about 2.4 percent of the population, and there are twenty-four Indigenous territories that exist formally on about 6.7 percent of the national land area, less than was originally held by members of these groups (IWGIA n.d.). These groups tend to live geographically far from San José and the Greater Metropolitan Area, typically along Costa Rica's southern border with Panamá (Pearce 2023).

On the climate front, things had seemed encouraging before the election. In August 2021, the Costa Rican legislature was set to vote on a proposed ban on all future extraction or exploration of fossil fuels in the country. Christiana Figueres publicly supported this ban and several celebrities from the United States, including Jane Fonda and Mark Ruffalo, also expressed their support for it (AFP 2021). However, after receiving a note from the Costa Rican Chamber of Industries supporting future fossil fuel exploration, lawmakers failed to take up the vote (Goering and Rodriguez 2021).

At the 2021 COP meeting in Glasgow, Scotland, Costa Rica's new minister of the environment and former DCC-staffer Andrea Meza Murillo partnered with Denmark's Climate Minister to launch the BOGA, the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (Mathiesen 2021). The move represented a stunning partnership between the global north and the global south to help countries move away from fossil fuel reliance and to directly stand up to the powerful fossil fuel industry. However, in a 180-degree reversal from just one year prior, in November 2022, heading into the COP27 meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, Costa Rican planners announced that the country would no longer lead the BOGA (Rodriguez 2022).

Do current events in Costa Rica—a political turn toward the right and toward more fringe political views, a rise in social inequality, corruption, and violence, contentious land battles, and a reversal on the Costa Rican approach to the fossil fuel industry—refute the argument and findings of this book? I believe that they do not. In fact, these current events highlight the core message of this book. The historically more egalitarian class structure that developed in Costa Rica over time gave way to a more generous distribution of public goods. The elite incorporated to a certain extent, rather than battling against, small-scale coffee growers since there was a benefit to all in doing so. There was more of a coming together of the middle and upper classes in Costa Rica than elsewhere. This fostered a decades-long pattern by

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which the government extended generous social services to the public, thus raising metrics of national development (see tables 2.1 to 2.5). Over several decades, the relatively unified elite subculture went green, adopting some of the most ambitious climate mitigation policies in the world. Oftentimes, ministers and/or presidents, as members of this green elite, played a decisive role in helping to advance a policy at a particular moment when they saw an opportunity to connect current climate policies to salient people and events from Costa Rica's past.

As the epigraph to this chapter makes clear, Costa Rica is perhaps the country best suited to decarbonize its economy. If it can't achieve this goal by the timeline the IPCC (2018) has urged is necessary, what does this mean for Costa Rica and for the rest of the world?

In the same way that these forces developed historically to enhance social equity and environmental protection, these forces can unravel and chip away at equality and environmental protections. As much as the past of Costa Rica should give us hope about how social institutions can rise and grow to enhance the public good and protect the environment, it should also give us pause and remind us how precarious this stability is. As inequality has risen, policies aiming at environmental protection and especially climate mitigation are threatened. In a context of rising inequality, the relatively unified elite subculture that has existed in Costa Rica for nearly a century loses its incentive to invest in the public good. With rising inequality, good governance has more difficulty raising up large portions of society, and good governance decisions seem no longer worth the investment they require. Instead, each person is on their own, which explains the rising levels of corruption.

Tourism, the reason why some readers of this book may already be familiar with the Costa Rican landscape, is unfortunately one of the forces exacerbating a rise in domestic economic inequality. Coffee had a redistributive effect on society. As Costa Rica has moved from a small-scale agriculturally based economy toward a service-based one, the redistributive benefits of coffee have been lost. There are some regional differences (with a greater historical presence of hotels held by multinational companies along Costa Rica's northwestern Nicoya Peninsula than its southwestern Osa Peninsula, Horton 2009), but an economy that relies on foreign-owned hotels for growth has led to a concentration, rather than a redistribution, of wealth. Also commenting on how acute this problem is in Guanacaste (see figure 2.1), Braun et al. (2015) write that in recent decades, "tax breaks and exceptions for multinational corporations building tourist infrastructure in the Guanacaste

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region—despite tax laws and policies that protect public goods—have reduced revenues to fund the social welfare programs at the heart of Costa Rican developmentalism" (358). Large-scale, all-inclusive, five-star resorts have come to dominate the northwest region of coastal Guanacaste, making tourism here dependent on wealthy consumers from the global north and making travel to Guanacaste financially inaccessible for many Costa Ricans (Braun et al. 2015). The neoliberal era has put pressure on countries like Costa Rica to pursue investment from abroad, resulting in a tourism sector that increasingly favors wealthy northerners over locals.

Today, most tourism in Costa Rica is not the kind of small-scale, off-the-beaten-track, nature-based ecotourism as originally conceived. Today, most tourists visit Costa Rican beaches and dabble in some nature-based activities or visits (Horton 2009, 94). As the tourism industry has grown, it has led to more exclusion among certain Costa Ricans. Beginning in the 1990s, there was a "powerful process of market exclusion as key groups—poorer Costa Ricans without access to capital and communities without beaches, ocean views, rain forest, or infrastructure—have been to a degree shut out of participation in key ecotourism activities" (Horton 2009, 99). The social, economic, and environmental tensions that tourism present in Costa Rica reflect those documented elsewhere (Gould and Lewis 2015). To help transform tourism into something that can be more beneficial for more Costa Ricans, I echo Koens, Dieperink, and Miranda (2009), who have called for an increase in local ownership of tourism destinations to increase the local and distributive economic benefits of the industry. Efforts like this might be able to help ecotourism fill its original goal of being a mechanism of sustainable development.

What is the way forward? In Costa Rica, only by directly working to include *all* Costa Ricans—not just those that have typically been included (those deemed "white" and those in the central valley)—and by direct intervention to enhance people's well-being, will a more just and equitable class structure exist in Costa Rica. And only in that context will we see a unified elite that, while not that different economically from the rest of the population, is highly educated, has transnational influence and impact, and will adopt the kinds of policies and create the kinds of institutions that can meaningfully lead to decarbonization and other climate mitigation goals. This instinct is still present in Costa Rica—but it must be nurtured. For example, the 2018 decarbonization plan called for greater attention to be paid to "inclusion, human rights and promotion of gender equality" and recognized that certain

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groups, including Indigenous people, can "play a key role as change actors in specific processes . . ." (Government of Costa Rica 2018, 67). This was a welcome and exciting step. It marked a significant change from prior documents, like those written after the carbon neutrality pledge, that did not reference the consequences of this commitment on marginalized groups. Now these words proclaiming inclusivity must be followed by actions that actually promote and enhance the public good for all people. In addition, the resolution of the Crucitas gold mining crisis (see chapter 5) presents some lessons for a possible way forward for more inclusive environmental governance in Costa Rica. Broad and Cavanagh (2015) write about the important role that "Central Valley indignation" played in helping to enact a new ban on open-pit mining projects (424). When the more privileged, resourced residents of Costa Rica's central valley used their resources and connections to join with the more rural environmentalists near Las Crucitas mine, together, members of civil society shut down ecologically and socially destructive gold mining.

Unfortunately, progress often depends on who sits in the seat of executive power. Although President Carlos Alvarado lent Costa Rica's support to the Escazú Agreement—an agreement that tries to open up "access to information, participation and justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean" in March 2018 in Costa Rica—as of this writing, President Chaves has not supported this agreement (Pearce 2023; United Nations 2023). Without political support to enhance equity and the public good, the future of Costa Rica's political stability, social equity, and environmental protection hangs in the balance. Many of these changes must come from domestic Costa Rican society. However, there is also a critical role for the global community.

The following are some hypotheses, developed from the case of Costa Rica, that might be relevant to studies of other nations' processes of adopting climate mitigation goals:

1. States with more egalitarian class structures will more readily pledge to reduce emissions.
2. States with more egalitarian class structures will make more progress on meeting their emission reduction goals.
3. States that pride themselves on being socially and/or economically inclusive will pledge more readily to reduce emissions.

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4. States that actually are socially and/or economically inclusive will make more progress on meeting their emission reduction goals.
5. States with smaller total populations will pledge more readily to reduce emissions.
6. States with smaller total populations will make more progress on meeting their emission reduction goals.
7. States with economies that shift from distributive toward neoliberal will experience an increase in domestic inequality, which will undermine climate mitigation commitments and achievements.
8. States that display good governance will pledge more readily to reduce emissions.
9. States that display good governance will more readily follow climate mitigation commitments with actions (e.g., drafting plans) to actually try to reduce emissions.
10. States that display good governance will make more progress on meeting their emission reduction goals.

There are more hypotheses that we can take away from this case when we think more directly about the role of the green elite.

1. Small states with a small number of people in the elite will reach decisions faster about climate mitigation (either for better or for worse).
2. States with members of the elite who have transnational exposure and influence for positive things (e.g., Nobel Peace Prize) will pledge more readily to reduce emissions.
3. Small states with members of the same family in the elite will make faster decisions about climate mitigation (for better or for worse).
4. States with people in decision-making positions who have served in transnational positions related to climate change will make faster decisions about climate mitigation (for the better).
5. States with a small number of people in decision-making positions will make faster decisions about climate mitigation.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Humberto is a person who had been intimately involved in climate planning during the 1990s and had worked with several presidents during this time to

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initiate environmental plans in Costa Rica and raise the country's profile in international climate meetings. During our interview, he asked me the following rhetorical question: Do we (meaning Costa Rica) have a climate change policy? Before I could answer, he said, "Nope." How, after the detailed history of climate mitigation policies described in this book—including policies that Humberto had contributed to—could he say that? What Humberto was trying to draw my attention to was that, yes, while climate mitigation has been a priority for Costa Rica's green elite over the past several decades, but, no, leaders have largely ignored the issue of climate adaptation, or efforts to prepare Costa Ricans to live in a landscape that is altered by climate change. The Costa Rican government has not introduced or developed climate adaptation policies or plans during any of the years covered in this book. Members of the green elite understand this. The authors of the nation's 2015 INDC acknowledged that while Costa Rica has introduced climate plans since 2006, it lacks a single plan focused on adaptation. It was not until 2018, the same year as state planners released the decarbonization plan, that they also distributed Costa Rica's first climate adaptation plan.

Why does climate adaptation planning matter? As Humberto explained, the impact of a relatively minor climate impact, such as a small hurricane, can be significant. The October 2017 Hurricane Nate, for example, which made landfall in Central America as a category 1 storm, caused substantial damage in the country. Though this storm did not even hit Costa Rica directly, organizations from the United States, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Weather Service, reported that the storm produced a substantial amount of rainfall, caused thirteen deaths, and damaged agriculture, transportation, and housing. The Costa Rican National Institute of Meteorology (IMN) estimates that the storm was responsible for $562 million of damage (Bevin and Berg 2017).

Climate adaptation planning will also be central if Costa Rica is to maintain its status as a prime destination for foreign ecotourists. Reports from 2023 indicate that rising temperatures threaten the precarious ecosystem of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Preserve (Agence France-Presse 2023). If further climate impacts disrupt the cloud forest, this could also mean significant economic losses, as the area including and around Monteverde has long been a treasured destination for foreign scientists and tourists alike (Koens, Dieperink, and Miranda 2009).

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Why have members of the green elite not adopted climate adaptation policies with the same enthusiasm as they have pursued climate mitigation policies? Part of the answer can be found within the context of Costa Rica. Many members of the Costa Rican green elite are motivated to get ahead of the curve on climate mitigation. They are interested in pursuing mitigation policies before other countries have done so, perhaps to set the standard of how mitigation can be done, and to generate possible income for Costa Rica along the way. This desire to treat mitigation planning as a climate and economic "win-win" scenario is shared by policymakers in other countries that belong to the AILAC climate bloc (Edwards and Roberts 2015). This impulse is a reflection of Costa Rica's and other AILAC members' elevated levels of development. Costa Rican planners have for decades seen their country as more advanced than their neighbors and they are now willing to act "altruistically" by reducing planet-warming emissions, an action that will benefit people elsewhere as much as if not more than it will help their fellow Costa Ricans (Rudel 2014).

Samuel, a former minister of the environment, put it this way: "No one is against adaptation." In his mind, Costa Ricans widely accept that climate adaptation is a clear and present need that they must begin to address. In contrast, climate mitigation is more contentious. As he recalled it, the decarbonization plan was controversial among some people because they saw it as putting a *freno* (a "break") on employment and growth. In other words, because some people thought that climate mitigation commitments implied a slowing down of the engines of economic development (something that was not true in his mind and from his experience with the ministry), the members of the green elite found it necessary to prioritize climate mitigation over climate adaptation in order to combat this resistance.

While this rationale helps explain why the Costa Rican green elite has prioritized climate mitigation commitments over climate adaptation plans, there are also global forces that have led to this outcome. Recognizing the immense global inequality of climate injustice, or the fact that wealthy, industrialized nations were responsible for the first surge in anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions while poorer countries contributed almost nothing to the problem but suffered some of the first and most significant impacts from climate change (Roberts and Parks 2007), a greater need was realized for wealthy countries to provide climate finance. In 2009, developed countries

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committed to provide $100 billion US dollars per year in climate finance to developing nations (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015). While on its surface this commitment promised a way to invest in developing countries that are vulnerable to climate impacts, the funding has run into a number of issues including a difficulty in tracking it and disparate claims between countries in the north about how much aid they have provided and countries in the south and how much they have received (Roberts et al. 2021). Additionally, Roberts et al. (2021) add, "Of the claimed climate finance flows so far, only about 20% has targeted adaptation—the rest went to greenhouse gas mitigation projects" (181).

In the absence of adequate global finance for climate adaptation, there have been insufficient funds for countries like Costa Rica to pursue adaptation projects and plans. Although wealthier nations have repeatedly promised to set aside funds for adaptation projects in the global south, it wasn't until the 2022 COP27 meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh that wealthy countries agreed on a fund for paying lower-income countries for the "loss and damage" from climate impacts. The exact form and financing details of the fund are not yet known (Alayza et al. 2022). As Samuel added, it is "more difficult to find money for adaptation." Also, from a historical perspective, the international community has prioritized climate mitigation over climate adaptation. Consider the lessons from the early days of AIJ discussed in chapter 4. The UNFCCC's privileging of climate mitigation over climate adaptation has established a framework that should leave us with no surprises as to why Costa Rican planners have done the same.

Looking toward the future, one area where Costa Rica will benefit from adaptation investment and planning is in the diversification of its electricity grid. As discussed throughout this book, Costa Rica's electricity grid runs almost entirely on renewable sources. However, most of this electricity comes from hydropower plants. These plants are not without their own environmental and social costs independent of climate change (Fletcher and Frece 2020). However, Costa Rica's reliance on hydropower will be threatened as warming continues. Rising temperatures increase the amount of water lost through evaporation, and droughts or changes to precipitation patterns may threaten the ability of Costa Rica's hydropower plants to supply a consistent source of electricity to the population, something that has already happened elsewhere in the region (IEA 2021). Efforts to diversify Costa Rica's electricity grid, for example with solar and wind projects, could help the country

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avoid lapses in electricity supply. Recent research shows that countries with more INGO memberships tend to increase their solar generation faster than others (McCall 2020). However, since INGOs have had a marginal role in Costa Rica's domestic climate policy thus far, it remains unclear if Costa Rica will follow the path of other nations to increase its solar potential.

Costa Rica's climate mitigation plans and policies should simultaneously give us hope and make us cautious. On the one hand, they reveal the kind of climate mitigation ambition that comes from a country where leaders incorporated large portions of society and economically raised up generations of Costa Ricans. Numerous leaders have seen the benefits of drawing on the memories of people (e.g., José Figueres Ferrer) and notable achievements (e.g., abolishing the army) from Costa Rica's past that made Costa Rica into what international observers think of today when they conjure images of this small, peaceful, green country. On the other hand, this narrative shows us how precarious good governance is. As the nature of the economy has changed and as inequality has become more acute, environmentally destructive temptations like gold mining become newly relevant in Costa Rica and threaten the possibilities of climate mitigation action. Only by recommitting and fine-tuning the principles that once helped Costa Rica become a middle-income, developing country—economic redistribution and a more truly inclusive form of good governance—can Costa Rica and other nations commit to the kinds of steep emission reduction policies that are necessary to avoid further human-caused global warming.

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METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Between 2013 and 2021, I conducted thirty-nine interviews with people in key decision-making positions. Respondents include several former ministers of the environment, former government officials or advisors to government, scientists, academics, civil society advocates, and representatives from business. The majority of interviewees contributed directly to climate policy development in Costa Rica. A small number of them faced the consequences of such policies (e.g., a hotel manager).

I am not Costa Rican or of Latin American descent. I identify as a white, non-Hispanic woman from the United States. My positionality shapes what I saw—and more importantly, what I was looking for—and it is possible that someone from a different positionality would tell this story differently. Observations that became relevant for this story began when, as an undergraduate student, I studied in Zapote, a district along the edge of San José. I volunteered with the Ministry of the Environment in the city, where I spent my time working in a recycling plant. This experience helped me glance into the day-to-day workings of the ministry, the office principally responsible for overseeing national environmental issues.

I returned to San José for fieldwork as a graduate student in 2013 and 2015, and as a professor in 2019. I conducted the final interviews over Zoom in 2020 and 2021. It was not a straightforward process to make contact with the people most involved in Costa Rica's climate policies (e.g., the ministers of the environment). As table A.1 shows, interviews with some of the most central figures in Costa Rica's green elite happened in 2019 or 2021, late in the fieldwork process. During the 2013 trip, I visited the office of the Ministry of the

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Table A.1
Relevant information about respondents

Pseudonym	Interview date	Sector(s) respondent worked in at time of interview or previously worked in	Specific affiliation	Ever worked in or with gov't?
Arturo	8/1/13	Industry (Skype)	MBA. A director of sustainability at Dole.	No
Bernardo	8/22/13 & 7/10/15	Academia	PhD. Works at carbon neutrality program at Earth University. Involved with efforts to verify companies that have become carbon neutral.	No
Carlos	8/21/13	Government	Advanced degree from INCAE. Employee at the Climate Change Center (DCC).	Yes
Diego and Eduardo	8/27/13	Academia	Two PhD-holding academics from the University for Peace.	No
Fabian	8/28/13	Academia	PhD. Professor at The Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE).	No
Gustavo	8/26/13 & 7/6/15	Government, science	PhD. Employee at the DCC. Part of team that wrote the Costa Rican national carbon neutrality plan.	Yes
Héctor	7/21/15	Industry	Employee of Café Britt, a Costa Rican coffee company that sells coffee in twenty countries.	No
Iván	7/14/15	Bilateral aid	An employee of AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation).	No
Juan	7/9/15	Academia	PhD. Academic at the University of Costa Rica, Department of Government and Public Policy.	No
Luis	7/8/ 2015	Academia, government	PhD. Academic in the Department of Economics at the University of Costa Rica. Part of the team that wrote the national plan on carbon neutrality.	Yes

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Manuel	7/13/ 2015	Science, civil society, government	Biologist who was an employee of the MINAE from late 1990s to mid-2000s. Activist with the civil society group called the Foundation of the Ecological Flag.	Yes
Nicolás	7/15/ 2015	Certifying agency	An employee who works in the unit of the verification of greenhouse gases at INTECO, the Costa Rican Institute of Technical Norms.	Yes
Otto	7/21/ 2015	Industry	General manager of the first hotel in San José to become carbon neutral.	No
Pablo	7/16/ 2015 & 3/20/19	Science, government, academia, civil society	PhD. Professor at the University of Costa Rica. Peace with Nature coalition participant. Involved with various civil society organizations.	Yes
Rodrigo	7/13/ 2015	Government, industry	PhD. Former minister of the environment.	Yes
Sergio	7/22/ 2015	Science, government	Master's degree. Employee at the National Institute of Meteorology. The office is part of the Ministry of the Environment.	Yes
Tatiana	7/14/ 2015	Government	Architect. Works for the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Telecommunications. Part of the team that wrote the National Strategy plan on carbon neutrality.	Yes
Victor	7/8/ 2015	Industry	Master's degree. Director of environmental issues at CORBANA, a private company that oversees the banana industry in Costa Rica.	No
Ana	7/20/ 2015 (Skype)	Industry	Corporate communications manager of a luxury resort in the central, northern part of Costa Rica that has worked to become certified as "carbon neutral" since 2010.	No

(continued)

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Table A.1
(continued)

Pseudonym	Interview date	Sector(s) respondent works in at time of interview or previously worked in	Specific affiliation	Ever worked in or with gov't?
Blanca Catalina and Diana	7/20/2015	Civil society	Master's degree. Three employees at CEDARENA, the Center for Environmental and Natural Resource Rights. They create economic scenarios for environmental planning, community events, and regional planning related to sustainability.	No
Emilia	3/17/19	Government, civil society	Master's degree. Used to work in regional NGO for sustainable development. Went to several COPs for Costa Rican delegation	Yes
Félix	3/18/19	Academia, government, civil society	PhD. Professor at CATIE. Advisor to government. Civil society advocate.	Yes
Gerardo	3/19/19	Government	Engineer with several decades' worth of experience working at MINAE.	Yes
Humberto	3/19/19	Government, academia, civil society	Master's degree, additional graduate-level training, economist, long experience working in domestic and international civil society, as well as with government.	Yes
Ignacio	3/20/19	Government, civil society	PhD. Former minister of the environment.	Yes
Julieta	3/20/19	Government, NGO, private sector	Lawyer, staff at the DCC.	Yes
Lorenzo	3/21/19	Government	Master's degree, staff at the DCC.	Yes
María	3/21/19	Academia	Environmental engineer, sustainability office for a college.	No
Nathan and Ophelia	4/12/19	Academia, government, civil society	Two PhD-holding natural scientists from the United States, extensive experience in Costa Rica.	Yes

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Paulo	10/6/20 (Zoom)	Government, academia, INGO	PhD. Former minister of the environment.	Yes
Robert	3/9/21 (Zoom)	Government, private sector	Master's degree. Advisor to government in the 1990s.	Yes
Samuel	3/11/21 (Zoom)	Government, academia, INGO	Lawyer. Former minister of the environment, decades' worth of experience in government, civil society, and academia.	Yes
Tobias	3/16/21 (Zoom)	Government, academia, INGO	PhD. Former minister of the environment, decades' worth of experience in government, civil society, and academia.	Yes
William	3/25/21 (Zoom)	Government	Engineer. Former minister of the environment.	Yes
Andrés	4/5/21 (Zoom)	Quasi-governmental agency	MBA. Staff at FONAFIFO (the National Forestry Financing Fund).	Yes
Barbara	5/27/21 (Zoom)	Government	DBA degree. Advisor to the government in the 1990s.	Yes

(*Source:* Author)

Environment and Energy (MINAE) and was redirected to the new Climate Change Center (DCC). During the 2013 visit, I made some contacts and created lists of prospective people to interview. I gathered these names from the visit to the DCC and from any documents I could find on the MINAE's or the DCC's websites. While these archival documents were themselves pieces of data for my fieldwork, they also inspired the interview portion of the fieldwork by pointing out names of people whom I identified as being involved in climate mitigation policymaking.

During the 2015 visit, I reinterviewed someone from the 2013 visit. This person became one of several important gatekeepers in my fieldwork, as this person revealed the names and contact information of other people I should interview. I contacted prospective interviewees over email. During each interview, I asked for the names of additional interviewees, thus building a snowball sample. During the 2019 visit, I followed up with someone from 2015, again asking for updated contact information for other key informants and asking for additional names of people to interview. In 2019, I had an unexpected and happy meeting with someone who became another gatekeeper by making some of the final interviews possible. Knowing the main actors in Costa Rica's climate (and to the extent possible, environmental) history—their names, their appearances, and their backgrounds—helped me turn my unusual experience into one that changed the nature of this project. Costa Rica is a small country, with an interconnected set of people in decision-making positions. This is the topic of chapter 3 and is very relevant to how I conducted my fieldwork. In other words, my fieldwork on the green elite built from 2013 to 2021, with some of the most consequential interviews happening near the end of the project. This project involved a slow, but steady, building up of the sample that eventually led me to interview half a dozen former ministers of the environment. I asked each interviewee for relevant primary documents.

Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English, whichever was the preference of the interviewee. Interviews were not recorded since several people interviewed were still in office at the time of the interview. The presence of a recorder may have shaped what individuals were willing to say. Therefore, I took notes during each interview and transcribed and translated these notes after each interview. More than once, respondents requested to tell me something off the record, which I did not write down; again, this highlights the smallness of the Costa Rican political scene, where a bad word said

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to a foreign interviewer could potentially come back around to influence that official in a future situation. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours and 45 minutes, with an average time of a little over an hour.

This process created field notes, which are referenced throughout the book. The field notes were written in English, except for quotations from interviews conducted in Spanish. I was sometimes able to quickly capture a direct quotation. When I was able to do that, respondents' words appear in quotes. When I could not do this, I cite my field notes, which offer the closest possible version of what respondents said. I used the interviews to capture respondents' recollections about the process of climate mitigation policy development. Two interviews conducted during early fieldwork took place over Skype for logistical reasons. Due to circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews conducted in 2020 or 2021 took place over Zoom. I did not record interviews conducted over Skype or Zoom.

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NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. According to Levin, Song, and Morgan (2015), carbon neutrality means "annual zero net anthropogenic (human caused or influenced) CO2 emissions by a certain date. By definition, **carbon neutrality** means every ton of anthropogenic CO2 emitted is compensated with an equivalent amount of CO2 removed (e.g. via carbon sequestration), but this term has been used differently on occasion." Levin, Song, and Morgan (2015) point out that state leaders have often misinterpreted what the term "carbon neutrality" means, and they cite the example of Costa Rica's language from its 2015 Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC). Again, Levin, Song, and Morgan (2015) write that Costa Rica's INDC would "achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2021 with total net emissions comparable to total emissions in 2005," . . . Instead of aiming at zero net emissions, some countries seem to misinterpret carbon neutrality as stabilizing emissions at a certain level." With the initial neutrality pledge (see chapter 5), Costa Rican officials simply used the term "carbon neutral" without attaching a stabilizing end date to the goal. In addition, in the 2015 INDC, planners stated Costa Ricans' goal to "accomplish zero net emissions by 2085." It is unclear if the authors of the plan meant zero net carbon emissions or zero net total greenhouse gas emissions. Again, according to Levin, Song, and Morgan (2015), "**net zero carbon emissions** is considered a synonym for carbon neutrality. One key difference, however, is carbon neutrality can be achieved at the domestic level with offsets from other jurisdictions, while net zero emissions does not have the same connotation (though theoretically could be met via offsets)." Although carbon neutrality and net-zero carbon emissions are nearly synonymous, Costa Ricans I spoke with who worked on crafting these plans implied an increase of ambition with the move from carbon neutrality to net-zero emissions. It remains unclear, with the net-zero goal, whether they intend to account for all greenhouse gas emissions or just carbon dioxide. Authors again implied an increase in climate mitigation ambition with the move from carbon neutrality and

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net zero to decarbonization. Again, according to Levin, Song, and Morgan (2015), "**Decarbonization** is framed around decreasing the ratio of carbon dioxide (CO2) or all greenhouse gas emissions related to primary energy production. While full decarbonization means zero unabated (not captured by carbon sequestration or storage) CO2 emissions from energy generation and industrial processes, decarbonization doesn't imply zero emissions, as emissions can be balanced by carbon sequestration if adequate reductions or enhanced carbon sinks exist. To effectively communicate the scale of change needed, the term must be accompanied by a timeframe and rates of decarbonization." While reducing emissions from "primary energy production" is a focus of Costa Rica's 2018 decarbonization plan, it is not the only goal of the plan. This suggests that decarbonization represents an umbrella goal under which various environmental goals could be grouped. Costa Rica's decarbonization plan does include a time frame (Levin, Song, and Morgan 2015).

2. The pattern for all greenhouse gas emissions is similar to that of carbon dioxide specifically.

CHAPTER 2

1. Some data were not available for the exact year noted in the table. When that was the case, data from the closest possible year is displayed (always within two years).

2. Autonomous institutions are "semi-independent government agencies charged with responsibility for specific tasks . . . these tasks cover a broad range of activities that might be carried out by government departments or the private sector in other countries" (Wilson 1998, 54). AIs in Costa Rica provide a very wide range of services including electricity, education, tourism, and finances.

3. Similar claims have been made about coffee in certain national contexts; see Paige 1998, Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 3

1. It is important to distinguish between places where members of the elite are unified in life experiences vs. unified in ideas and not able to exchange ideas freely. The green elite in Costa Rica does not represent a small, "ideologically unified elite," where "structural integration and value consensus are seemingly monolithic" (Burton, Gunther, and Higley 1992, 11).

2. This report uses the language of regions. Regions are different from provinces (see figure 2.1).

CHAPTER 6

1. There is a slight difference between the list of Peace with Nature committee members according to Ponchner and Vargas M. (2007) and what is listed in table 6.1.

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Committee members with an asterisk next to their names were not listed according to Ponchner and Vargas M. (2007); however, interviewees told me that these people were on the committee.

2. Each of the seven provinces in Costa Rica (figure 2.1) is divided into smaller units called *cantones*. Each *cantón* is further divided into *distritos*.

3. It was not until 2013 that Costa Rica established "the first carbon market in the developing world" (*Tico Times* 2013a). This market, overseen by the Climate Change Center (DCC) oversees the creation and trade of carbon credits or Costa Rican Compensation Units (UCCs), from domestic reductions in emissions. Costa Rican businesses can reduce emissions and then purchase UCCs to offset emissions they are unable to reduce on their own.

4. Developing countries were invited to submit NAMAs after the COP18 meeting in Doha in 2012 to address climate mitigation at the national level or within specific national sectors (UNFCCC n.d Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions).

CHAPTER 7

1. Early on, the government removed taxes against the importation of electric vehicles (Lara S. 2019) but as of this writing is considering a revision to this rule (Brenes 2023).

2. There are prohibitions that limit cars with license plates ending in certain numbers from driving in the greater San José area on certain weekdays. For example, on Mondays, cars with license plates ending in 1 or 2 are unable to drive in the downtown area between early morning and late evening. Electric vehicles receive special green-colored license plates and do not have to abide by these restrictions (Lara S. 2019).

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